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Linda Drucker
GUATEMALA'S 'HOLY WAR' & THE POPE

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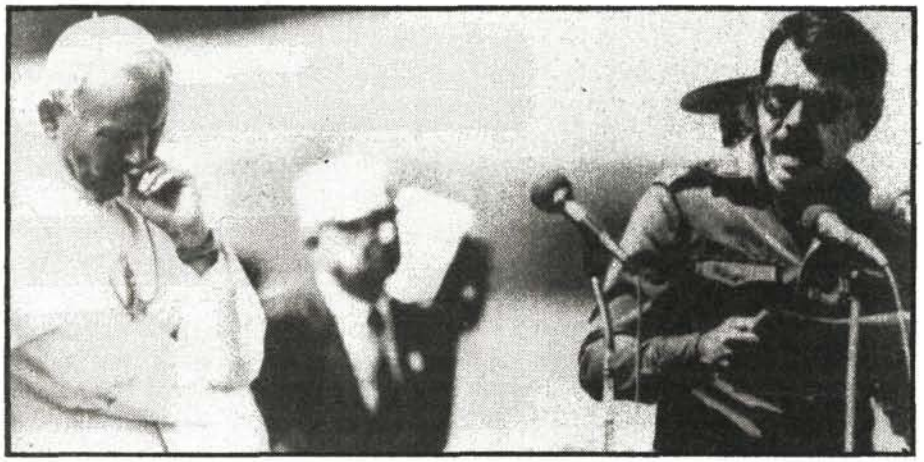

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Correspondence

ALIENATION IN THE CHURCH

RESPONSES TO DAVID O'ROURKE

Logansport, Ind.

To the Editors: Father David O'Rourke's article "Revolution and Alienation in the American Church" [Feb. 11] carried a vitally important message that was long overdue.

While many revolutionaries view themselves as prophets who are doomed to a lonely fight, too often this is based on the supposition that the typical parishioner does not have a sophisticated world-view and is, therefore, beyond the reach of communication. When this is combined with the penchant of too many liberals to righteously condemn anyone who they feel lacks the requisite finely-tuned social conscience, the Mystical Body of Christ can become a combat zone.

In these perilous times, we need leaders who can lead, and that involves (a) knowing one's constituency and (b) working from *their* frame of reference. Anything less is futile and destructive.

BILL McTAGGART

Greensburg, Pa.

To the Editors: Father David O'Rourke's thoughtful piece [Feb. 12] contains a central flaw. He sees the new leaders coming only from the National Bishops' Conference, senates of priests, the leadership organizations of women and men religious.

That clerical view misses the thrust of Vatican II and the leadership from within the laity.

(MOST REV.) NORBERT F. GAUGHAN
Auxiliary Bishop

Middletown, Conn.

To the Editors: David K. O'Rourke writes [Revolution and Alienation in the American Church," Feb. 11]: ". . . alienation does not come from disagreements on moral or political issues between the leaders and people of the church. It is due more to a gulf between them. The experience of conversion and commitment that is common on the leadership level of the church is simply not part of the experience of many Catholic people."

Though it is true that the American bishops have exercised renewed leadership with respect to their collective commitment to nuclear disarmament, our church is not a single issue church and this single commitment, while laudable, does not warrant the suggestion that the gulf between 'the leadership' (which reads: the bishops or the hierarchy) and "many Catholic people" (which reads: the laity) obtains from a margin of moral superiority. A gulf exists, it is true. Its causes, however, are multiple and complex but not least of which include the clerical elitism that rears its condescending snoot in O'Rourke's engaging but myopic essay.

The "peace church" can count among its heralds Catholic lay men and women whose courageous voices tugged at consciences long before our bishops began to squeak at Vietnam. And whose experience of conversion is more evocative of the prophetic mission of the church today than those lay women and men who confront those same bishops in order to name injustice against the disenfranchised (women in general, gay men and lesbian women in particular) the more immediate and chronic threat to peace?

The bishops' thundering about nuclear disarmament is welcome but what is needed is resonance with more humble truths.

(REV.) JOHN J. TIVENAN
Roman Catholic Chaplain
Wesleyan University

Smithtown, N.Y.

To the Editors: David O'Rourke's article [Feb. 11] begins to define a question that the American Catholic church will spend many anxious years in answering. We all know that, for whatever reasons, the church has been in crisis and revolution since the Vatican Council. The real surprise lies in the direction in which this crisis now seems to be leading us.

Father O'Rourke states that the current growing alienation from the church of "uninvolved Catholics" is a tragedy. I certainly agree but I wonder how these people are any more alienated today than at any other time. Alienation from the church is ultimately a form of alienation from God. The difference between the people Father O'Rourke describes and those nominal Catholics in the American church of thirty years ago is that the church was once content to recognize these people as dues-paying members; the church said that because of certain defined actions and behavior they were indeed Catholic; this supposedly same church now is saying that today this will no longer do. The error that has caught up with us is not that the church is suddenly so bold as to ask for a change of heart and a faith response from her would-be members. The error seems to be that there was a time when it was at least perceived that this was not required.

The truth is that the Catholic church in America has sheltered religiously alienated people for years. If these people were not separated from the institutional, fraternal church they were separated from the source in Christ. Which is the greater alienation? The church is simply now saying that you can't have one without the other and it strikes many as a new revelation.

(Continued on page 252)

Commonweal is indexed in Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature, Catholic Periodical Index, Index of American Periodical Verse, Book Review Digest and Book Review Index. Microfilm from Vol. 1, 1924, to current issues available through University Microfilm, 300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, Mi. 48106 and on Microfiche from Bell & Howell, Micro-Photo Division, Old Mansfield Road, Wooster Ohio 44691. Serials Data program No.: ISSN 0010-3330. Second-class postage paid at New York, N.Y. Copyright © 1983 Commonweal Publishing Co.

Ilustrations: Cover, Religious News Service Photo; p. 231, Tom Whittemore, Rothco; Uluschak, *Edmonton Journal*; pp. 235, 242, Bas.; p. 236, Dennis Renault, *Sacramento Bee*; p. 239, Mitro, *Ta Nea*, Greece.

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Commonweal, A Review of Public Affairs, Religion, Literature, and the Arts, is published biweekly, except monthly Christmas-New Year's and July and August, by Commonweal Publishing Co., 232 Madison Ave., New York, N.Y. 10016. Telephone: (212) MU 3-2042. Single copy, $1.25. Yearly subscriptions, U.S., $24; Canada, $26; foreign, $29. Special two-year rate: U.S., $43; Canada, $47; foreign, $53. All Canadian and foreign subscriptions must be paid in U.S. dollars by International Money Order or by check on a U.S. bank.

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THE RISKS IN CENTRAL AMERICA

NICARAGUA: on the verge of full-scale civil war and possibly foreign invasion. *El Salvador*: government forces so hard-pressed by the guerrilla insurgency that Reagan has asked Congress for $110 million in emergency military aid. *Guatemala*: mopping up exercises after last year's military sweeps that the Guatemalan bishops compared to genocide, writing, "Not even the lives of old people, pregnant women, or innocent children were respected." *Moscow and Washington*: dark references to Soviet schemes to implant strategic missiles in Nicaragua or otherwise threaten the Panama Canal and vital U.S. shipping routes. *Capitals throughout the Western hemisphere*: peace plans for Central America floating in the air like soap bubbles, only to be pricked by one or another nation's reticence.

The United States has a number of interests in Central America. The U.S. has an interest in preventing the area from becoming an armed base for the Soviet Union. The U.S. has an interest in the security of the Panama Canal and of the biggest "domino," Mexico. The U.S. has an interest in supporting the growth of democratic institutions in that region rather than military or revolutionary dictatorships. The U.S. has an interest in earning the good will of the people despite a history of thirty-three American military interventions in the Caribbean and Central America over the last ninety years. And finally the U.S. has an interest in not being complicit with murderers and the protectors of murderers, whose immediate crimes cry to the heavens no matter what long-term justifications are made for them, and who stain with blood whatever benefit this nation would render to the cause of freedom and human dignity the world over.

It may be difficult to serve all those interests equally well. Some, after all, may conflict at times with others. But the last several years of U.S. Central American policy have managed to achieve something nearly as difficult—the simultaneously *dis*serving of all those interests. There is hardly a point among them on which we are not worse off than we were in 1980.

Catholics, too, have a number of special interests in Central America. The faith is woven deeply into the fabric of the region's life. In the past, the church has been implicated in the maintenance of oligarchical power; today, it is implicated in the struggles against that power and for a measure of equality and justice. American Catholics, directly touched by the experiences, the sufferings, and the martyrdoms of missionaries, have taken an unprecedented interest in those struggles. The American bishops have been a strong voice for restraint and caution in the face of a U.S. policy that has preferred to ignore the local and social causes of Central American turmoil and recast the area's problems in military and East-West terms. Some American Catholics—as well as many non-Catholic fellow-citizens and, of course, many Latin Americans, too—have been in the one revolutionary regime to

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emerge in the region, Nicaragua's, a kind of beacon shining toward a just society.

There are three focal points for policy in Central America. Guatemala presents the simplest problem, because in most ways it presents the most horrifying situation. The account recently published in the *New Republic* (April 11, 1983) of General Rios Montt's campaign of rural terror ought to make anyone's blood run cold. Women and children massacred, young men tortured, Indian villages bombed, a million people homeless—these were not incidental atrocities committed by troops run wild but established practices that were part of a centrally supervised effort. It is worth recalling, as Allan Nairn points out in the *New Republic*, that Rios Montt was trained in counter-insurgency at Fort Bragg; indeed, in 1973 he served as director of studies at the Department of Defense's Inter-American Defense College in Washington. Is it surprising that Central Americans would link the U.S. to Rios Montt's terrorism, just as Eastern Europeans hold Moscow accountable for their Soviet-tutored local keepers? The Carter administration did cut off arms to Guatemala; but besides complaining that Rios Montt had received "a bum rap," Reagan has started supplying spare parts plus who know what amount of covert aid. Now, because of the deathly calm momentarily descending on Guatemala and because new aid may allegedly provide "leverage" with which to improve the Guatemalan army's human rights record, some people are urging that the U.S. provide Guatemala with more assistance. That makes about as much sense as sending Hitler ovens in hopes that he might be more moderate in using them. If one wants to play *realpolitik*, there are better arguments for supplying the Guatemalan guerrillas than for supplying the government.

El Salvador is much more complicated. Despite several premature announcements of the guerrillas' demise, they now seem to be stronger than before. The guerrillas appear to be fueled in part by Marxist-Leninist ideology that hardly promises a better future for El Salvador, in part by simple revulsion against a regime that both fosters and tolerates widespread assassination, and that remains subservient to entrenched economic interests. Americans who cannot understand that kind of rebellion should think back to European resistance movements in which Communists and democrats did not let competing visions of the future keep them from uniting against the evils of the moment. In public, Washington and Salvadoran officials attribute the successes of these guerrillas to the arms and training they receive from Nicaragua, Cuba, and the Soviet bloc. In private, these officials admit that the Salvadoran military is a mess—despite a great deal more arms and training from the U.S. So now there is talk of adding the games of rotating generals and new military tactics to the games of paper amnesties and periodic elections we have already begun, and please, please, don't anyone bring up Vietnamn.

The alternative is to take up the insurgents' offer to enter negotiations. Yes, that would jar the standing government's legitimacy. Perhaps it should. There are risks in such a course, but more risks, it seems to us, in the path the U.S. is now following. Archbishop Hickey recently testified to Congress that while some continuation of military aid to El Salvador may be necessary, it must "be conditioned on stringent requirements linking it to a pursuit of dialogue and ceasefire."

And Nicaragua. Since the bulk of this issue explores the complexities of the situation there, we limit ourselves to two observations. First, while it is understandable that so much hope has been placed, especially by many Catholic activists, in the Sandinista regime that succeeded a cruel Somoza dictatorship, Catholic liberationists have been delinquent in not subjecting that regime to the "social analysis" on which they pride themselves. That social analysis must subsume the lessons of Montesquieu and Madison as well as of Marx and recognize that, regardless of Sandinista intentions, the Nicaraguan leaders' unwillingness to guarantee institutionally independent centers of thought and action promises to be disastrous to freedom. Second, while we sympathize with those Nicaraguans struggling to force the Sandinistas to return to the original pledges of political pluralism and non-alignment, we believe that the current U.S. assistance to Nicaraguan guerrillas retaining heavy Somocista leadership is both illegal and self-defeating. There are diplomatic strategies that might well serve the cause of democracy in Nicaragua, providing incentives for a modus vivendi between the Sandinistas and their democratic dissidents; but it seems futile to recommend them to an administration that is blatantly contravening its own democratically voted laws.

BATTLE STARS

Dreams of military invulnerability have got to be the oldest on record. Hence the president's Star War speech gets us in our primary process, where our wishful thinking lies, just as it hits our enemies in the same place, where their worst fears lie. Who will deny the appeal of making nuclear weapons "impotent and obsolete" like French armor at Crécy? But English crossbows didn't stop the French back then, nor are ASATs likely to deter Moscow this time.

Mr. Reagan disingenuously did not mention that laser and particle beam satellites can be used offensively as well as defensively, indeed for a first strike. Nor did he present his nuclear shield as part of a bilateral agreement with the Soviets, one that would guarantee their invulnerability as well as ours. But that is the only basis upon which a high frontier defense might possibly lead to a safer world for our children. As it stood, the scheme seemed the usual one-upmanship that has locked the superpowers into their spiraling dance of death for decades. The Russians will have to match us battle star for battle star. Or should they really panic at the prospect of the Big American Brother o'erlooking their ICBMs, imagine the temptation of a pre-emptive first strike—or simply defending themselves with a small nuclear blast in space, thus wreaking command and control havoc. The Russians aren't alone in needing assurances on this score; the American people might well be nervous too.

For the fact is that Mr. Reagan's dream must be put in the

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context of (1) those hard-line "survivalists" in the administration who, contrary to standard deterrence doctrine, plan to let the Kremlin know the U.S. *accepts* the risk of nuclear war, and hence (2) Secretary Weinberger's $1.6 trillion five-year arms buildup which counts on more of everything—carriers, naval forces, M-1 tanks, MX missiles, B-1 bombers, cruise missiles, and the skilled personnel to handle these complicated weapons—in order to fight either nuclear or conventional war "across the full spectrum of conflict." To this daunting arsenal Reagan would now add an estimated $200 billion to develop weapons for an even wider spectrum conflict.

It was, of course, just the lunatic prospect of this kind of runaway arms race which persuaded the Soviets, in 1972, to forgo anti-ballistic defenses through the ABM treaty. Back in 1967, Alexei Kosygin was arguing just as Ronald Reagan is today, for no limitation on futuristic weapons or defenses against them. He finally saw the point, and his successor, Yuri H. Andropov must think it a cruel joke that he's now arguing as LBJ and Robert S. McNamara did only a decade ago.

Washington report

BUDGET MANEUVERS

DEMOCRATS IN THE HOUSE

THE DEMOCRATIC party is alive and well—and living in the House of Representatives. Evidence of this—specifically, in the House's budget resolution—prompted President Reagan to declare that it would bring "joy to the Kremlin." Not that he expects Mr. Andropov to be at the next Democratic fundraiser; rather the president feels that the House budget threatens U.S. national security by allowing for only a 4 percent increase in defense spending when he asked for 10 percent growth—after inflation. He might well be frustrated because the adoption of the resolution reflects a resurgence of the Democrats as the effective majority after two years of the House's being controlled by the Republican-conservative coalition—whose budget resolutions provided for massive increases in defense and for drastic cuts in taxes and domestic programs.

At every step of the way, the House Democratic leadership guided the first budget resolution, which sets spending and revenue targets as guidelines for congressional action in the coming months. The leadership kept major factions talking, cajoled and jawboned when necessary, used the Democratic Caucus effectively, maintained a very accurate tab on every member, and outmaneuvered the Republicans to a hard-earned victory. Budget Committee Chair James Jones worked closely with almost the entire leadership. Speaker O'Neill, Majority Leader Jim Wright, and Majority Whip Tom Foley were working in concert—no mean novelty in itself. Only Ways and Means Committee Chair Dan Rostenkowski was conspicious by his absence as a team player.

Some very helpful tactics were in fact learned from the other side. OMB Director David Stockman had faced a dilemma not unlike that facing the House Budget Committee—how to convince their respective leaders that the deficit could not be reduced solely from further cuts in social programs (Mr. Reagan) or in defense (Mr. O'Neill). Mr. Stockman devised a questionnaire format for the president which demonstrated that his desire for large increases in defense spending could not be achieved without either (a) cuts in social programs and entitlements so deep that they were unacceptable even to Mr. Reagan (or were at least not politically feasible) or (b) increases in taxes (anathema). Unprecedentedly high deficits were the only recourse—with a contingency tax allowed two years later if Mr. Reagan got everything else he asked for.

The Budget Committee seized upon Stockman's example and constructed their own questionnaire for the Speaker. The same trade-off situation was demonstrated, only with Mr. O'Neill discovering in the exercise that to save social programs, cuts in defense spending became too deep to be politically acceptable. Raising taxes was found to be the only recourse to get the deficit below that of the Reagan budget.

The Speaker was so pleased with going through these policy alternatives that during the first week of March he presented the exercise to the Democratic Policy Steering Committee and then to all Committee Chairmen (with some membership overlap). The questionnaire was preceded by a series of charts clearly showing that under present policy there was a projected deficit of over $300 billion. Underpinning the entire exercise was the Budget Committee's consistent message that between today and 1988, the cyclical part of the deficit resulting from the recession will decline but the structural deficit rising from current tax and spending policies will grow to record levels, eating up U.S. savings for capital investment.

This "Exercise in Hard Choices," as it was dubbed, was then presented to every Democratic member of the House under the aegis of the Speaker and the House Democratic leadership. Regional whip meetings were called where at least one member of the Budget Committee was present to respond to the many questions that arose as other members went through the exercise. Those members who did not show were given the option of attending another series of meetings. Those who still did not participate were called by the Speaker or the leadership and urged to do so. By the end of the second week of March, 186 of the 268 Democrats in the House had gone through these series of budget choices and had completed and returned the exercise to the Budget Committee. A revealing budget picture had been drawn by a complete cross section of the party, apparently accurately reflecting all factions from right to left. By generating a dialogue over the available policy alternatives the exercise was able to give House Democrats a good idea of what it's like to be a member of the Budget Committee. It also got the Democratic leadership further involved in and committed to the budget process.

In December the Budget Committee had begun discussions with committee chairmen disgruntled over the past use of the budget process—particularly the instructions allowing com-

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mittees little flexibility in meeting spending limits. In addition, the Appropriations Committee and others have blamed the budget process at least in part for the appropriations delays and last-minute confrontations with the president. Accommodations that eventually appeared in the budget resolution's reconciliation and enforcement provisions appear to have been drafted to meet some of those complaints. As a result, the Budget Committee significantly enhanced House receptivity to its proposals.

Concerned with expediting the process, the Budget Committee announced in January that the budget resolution would be presented to the House during the week of March 21—and indeed it was. The Speaker and the leadership kept every major actor busy bartering with the Budget Committee, so that every committee's basic needs would be accommodated whenever possible. In addition, Chairman Jones continually caucused with the caucus of the twenty Democratic members of the Budget Committee (which you may recall had been decidedly strengthened by the leadership with eight members of proven loyalty).

The survey of members' responses was skillfully used by Mr. Jones during committee caucus in drafting the Democratic budget. For instance, when challenged that his indefinite delay of the tax cut might not pass on the floor he would point out that 63 percent of the Democratic members chose outright repeal of the Administration's third-year tax cut, while an additional 34 percent would cap or reduce the third year. In defense spending, when given the option of seven, five, or three percent real growth (after inflation), 43.5 percent of the members chose five and 40.9 percent chose three; the Committees then reported a resolution calling for four percent growth in military spending.

The major problem for the Budget Committee was to accommodate both the desire for an as yet unspecified jobs program—considerably more extensive than the $4.95 billion bipartisan jobs package just enacted—and the reluctance to raise taxes. The balancing act between jobs and taxes became particularly acute in meetings with the Black Caucus—whose commitment to jobs was intense and in some cases unyielding. (Four of the 21 members were so bitter that they voted with the Republicans against the Democratic rule providing for the terms of the resolution's debate.) The resulting compromise allowed for a total of $17 billion in outlays for FY 1984 for both short-run emergency assistance programs and longer range research and development, infrastructure, and human resource programs.

Although the Committee had wished to focus on deficit reduction in the later years, getting below Mr. Reagan's deficit came to have a powerful political life of its own. The Democrats were eventually able to hammer out a measure providing for a deficit of $179.5 billion, $4.7 billion lower than the FY 1984 deficit under the president's budget, and keeping as well under the president's deficits for fiscal years 1985 and 1986. This was accomplished at the political cost of revenue increases which, after the tax provisions in the bipartisan Social Security package, were gained by scaling back the tax cuts of 1981. The Democratic proposal calls for the passage of additional tax legislation providing for increases of $30 billion in FY in 1984, $40 billion in FY 1985 and $50 billion in FY 1986. During Budget Committee markup repeated attempts by the Republican minority to amend the budget resolution were rebuffed by a cohesive Democratic majority. To Republican outcries against tax increases, the Democrats replied that even with the further increases proposed, there would still be a net tax cut of $58.2 billion in FY 1984, $72.8 billion in FY 1985, and $96.3 billion in FY 1986, as a result of the 1981 tax bill.

The Democratic ground rules for the debate allowed for only one alternative, and that was to be proposed by the Republicans. The leadership had not only turned down a budget proposal attempted by the Black Caucus, but also that of the defense-minded, 38-member Conservative Democratic Forum—better known as the "Boll Weevils." Most of the Black Caucus members were persuaded that providing for their alternative budget would open up an opportunity for the Boll Weevil budget—with the possibility of its passage, given its high defense spending and lower taxes and domestic spending.

The Republicans did not offer any alternative. The House adopted the Budget Committee's resolution on March 23 by a vote of 229 to 196. Thirty-six Democrats voted against it, 22 of whom were Boll Weevils. Four Republicans voted in favor of the Democratic budget—an indication of a much wider range of opinions among the Republicans as well, pointing to one of the reasons why the Republicans could not come up with their own proposal. Why they did not offer the Boll Weevil proposal is not clear. The White House, it appears, would not release House Republicans from a commitment to a 10 percent growth in defense spending. In recent years the budget process has been plagued by delays; Mr. Reagan's apparent inflexibility does not augur well for an end to them.

JEREMIAH BARUCH

(Jeremiah Baruch is the pseudonym of a Washington writer with a position in government.)

Report from Guatemala

THE POPE & 'HOLY WAR'

CONFRONTATION WITH RIOS MONTT

IN GUATEMALA, the pope had to confront a government accused of grave human rights violations but one which rules in what it describes as God's name (and a Protestant God at that). It is a country where influential sectors of society suspect the Catholic church of abetting radical movements, and whose fanatical Protestant president has allowed his army to bar the doors of Catholic churches and occupy convents, while he encourages a Chatauqua-like Protestant revival. It is a country where there is strong support for a no-holds barred

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campaign to annihilate leftist guerrillas and their civilian supporters, where "peace" is a highly controversial word. In such a climate, the Catholic pontiff's advocacy of dialogue and reconciliation as the solution to the nation's twenty-year-old guerrilla insurgency was bound to be considered subversive.

A dispute that occurred the week before the pope's arrival had the makings of a showdown between the moral authority of the Catholic church and the government of Efrain Rios Montt, who seized power in a 1982 coup, declaring he was "God's messenger." Only seventy-two hours before the pope was to land in Guatemala City, Rios Montt—ignoring John Paul's special handwritten plea for clemency—had proceeded with the executions of six men convicted of political crimes by secret tribunals. The pope's harsh condemnation of the executions, and, by implication, the logic of state violence and extra-legal action, provoked the Guatemalan government to denounce the Vatican for meddling in its political affairs; on the eve of the pontiff's arrival Guatemala's Minister of Defense Oscar Mejias Victores was audaciously admonishing the pope to "render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's . . ."

Yet despite this inauspicious beginning, the pope's visit to Guatemala ultimately proved to be one of the most effective visits of his nine-day, eight-country Central American tour, thanks to Rios Montt. For Rios's decision to go ahead with the executions—which some believe was a last-ditch effort to force the pope to cancel his visit—completely backfired. If Rios originally intended to use the executions to demonstrate to hardliners in the military and private sector that he would not cave in to outside pressures, the final effect was the reverse. As overwhelming popular support for the pope became evident—and tensions erupted within the higher reaches of the government itself—Rios's posture of intransigence, even pugnacity, toward the Vatican abruptly changed to one of self-reproach, leaving the impression of a government floundering to compensate for what was a serious political error.

Realizing the potentially damaging impact of papal criticism in what, despite recent Protestant inroads, is still an overwhelmingly Catholic country, the government had advised newspapers against printing any Vatican condemnation of the executions and instead circulated a communiqué from a high official of the Protestant Church of the Word (Rios Montt's sect) praising Rios Montt for steadfastly complying with the law. Yet this attempt to manipulate public opinion failed, and the executions became the subject of heated debate among ordinary people, in sharp contrast to three similar executions in September which hardly roused a word.

Rios's blatant defiance of the pope's wishes had the paradoxical effect of turning what otherwise would have been a purely religious celebration of the Eucharist into a political protest; a sign of support for the pope, however religious in nature, became an indirect criticism of the government, or at least open to interpretation as such. At a time when a sweeping state-of-siege law expressly banned all political demonstrations, the government had no choice but to tolerate the more ambiguous demonstration of one million Guatemalans cheering a papal message that urged the peaceful reconciliation of contending forces even though it had assumed anti-government connotations.

The controversy over the pope's condemnation of the executions exacerbated already-existing strains within the Rios Montt government; in this sense it should not be regarded as an isolated incident, but as an additional point of contention within a government already divided between Catholics and Protestants, reformists and hardliners, economic nationalists and laissez-faire capitalists. The government's handling of the papal visit emboldened discontented sectors of the Rios government to voice broader complaints both publicly and privately, and Rios Montt was faced with a revolt in the ranks of his ordinarily docile State Council, an unelected body scorned by Guatemala's four leading political parties as lending a democratic facade to the Rios dictatorship. In a highly unusual step for a body whose entire membership was handpicked by Rios Montt himself, the Council demanded a special meeting with Rios to publicly express, for the first time, dissatisfaction over its limited role. Moreover, Council members told the press they felt they were being used in a "spectacle for public opinion consumption"—a statement that will make it far more difficult for defenders of the regime to point to the Council's existence as evidence of progress toward democratization as they have in the past. Directly linked to the government's treatment of the pope (Council members were irked when key presidential advisers "did not comply with the wishes expressed by the Council to afford the pope a warm welcome, and instead, adopted a cold, indifferent and rather disrespectful attitude"), the Council's public demand for a more meaningful political role is an example of how the pope's visit has given impetus to forces pushing for a more genuine democratization of Guatemalan politics.

A SIGN THAT the Guatemalan government was worried about the political consequences of the executions was the selection of a face-saving scapegoat soon after the pope's departure. By firing Guatemala's Ambassador to the Vatican Luis Valladares y Aycinena for allegedly being late in relaying the pope's request for pardons to his government, Rios Montt was attempting to give the impression that he simply had not received the papal plea in time. While the decision to proceed with the execution was clearly a deliberate and calculated act, at the time explicitly defended by Rios Montt and his advisers, the government was attempting to minimize opposition by

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shifting its explanation to one of technical failure. The government maintained that Valladares's notification of the papal request didn't reach Guatemala until a day after the executions. Valladares claims it had arrived two days earlier. Yet regardless of the date this particular letter arrived in Guatemala, there appears to have been ample time to postpone the killings. The papal nuncio in Guatemala told the *New York Times* that he had personally communicated the request to Rios Montt himself early in the week—the executions took place at sunrise Thursday. The unwarranted dismissal of the diplomat to the Vatican seemed to indicate that the Guatemalan government felt the political need to shift the responsibility for its behavior, that it was no longer feasible, either at home or abroad, to fully defend the decision as a necessity in the fight against subversion. As revealing as the firing itself was a line in the dismissal letter which said Valladares's action had "caused deep disgust and countless problems" within the Guatemalan government—an admission of the existence of severe internal recriminations after the fact. With Valladares, who at the time of his firing was dean of the Vatican diplomatic corps, suing the government for defamation of character, the credibility of the government charges against him are on the line.

Perhaps the most important effect of the pope's visit was also one of the least tangible, and that is the dissipation of the halo of religiosity that had given a certain legitimacy to Rios Montt's dictatorial regime. Even before he seized power in a March 1982 coup, the general's strong religious convictions and penchant for biblical quotation led many Guatemalans to mistakenly conclude that he was significantly different from other military men. The Christian Democratic Party, for example, had endorsed Rios Montt as their presidential candidate in 1974, only to admit nine years later that they had made a terrible mistake. Rios has continued to rely on his reputation for religiosity to lend credibility to his claim to be a reformer, while he has done little more than talk of reform. Moreover, in preachy Sunday television broadcasts designed to evoke sermons, Rios has repeatedly invoked God's name to justify the harsh counterinsurgency campaign that is at the heart of human rights violations in Guatemala. This "holy war against subversion"—in which religious-sounding reasons were invoked to justify a military strategy that included the suppression of Catholicism, which was thought to be linked to radical movements—was inherently paradoxical. While not totally undermining his support among Catholics, Rios Montt's confrontation with papal authority at least had the effect of highlighting these paradoxes, neutralizing some of the political advantages Rios had managed to reap from his image as a devout Christian. In the eyes of Guatemala's Catholics, who suffer from the anti-Catholic bias of Rios's policies, the holy war against subversion has perhaps become a touch less holy.

Would it be fair to say that the pope's visit caused an upheaval within the Rios Montt government? Probably not. In spite of Rios's admission on the Sunday following the pope's departure that "We, the government, know and understand that we have sinned, that we have abused power and we want to reconcile ourselves with the people," there is little sign that Rios has the political will to bring about concrete socio-economic or political reforms, even those he has already promised. Instead of lifting the state-of-siege on March 23 as he had pledged, Rios substituted a virtually indistinguishable state of emergency. He has not only failed to renounce either the death penalty or the secret, extra-legal trials, he has actually ordered the execution of five additional men convicted of similar crimes by similar tribunals. But although the pope's pleas failed to save the lives of these eleven men, they have succeeded in stimulating a debate within the higher reaches of the Rios Montt government, even within the military itself, over the appropriateness of the methods that otherwise would have been taken for granted. Resistance to reform is still high. But by exacerbating already existing tensions within the Rios Montt government and by lending a certain moral authority to its critics, the pope has strengthened the hand of those vying for a political liberalization in Guatemala.

LINDA DRUCKER

(Linda Drucker has worked as a reporter for Time *and the* Los Angeles Times. *As a free-lance writer and journalist with a special interest in Latin American politics, she has traveled widely in Central and South America, recently returning from a trip to Guatemala.)*

Of several minds: *Abigail McCarthy*

PAROCHIAL SCHOOLS, STILL

A FOCAL POINT FOR CATHOLIC IDENTITY

AS MEMBERS of the National Catholic Education Association began filtering into Washington for their April convention and the attendant assessment of the state of the Catholic schools, it occurred to me that one question about Catholic schools is seldom raised any more. That is: should the schools exist at all? There was a time, when lay movements were burgeoning, that the question used to be raised regularly.

The parochial school system, as we know it, was mandated by the First Provincial Council of Baltimore in 1829, but even at the time there were a few bishops who thought that separate Catholic "common" schools were a mistake. They argued privately that they were unnecessary and might hurt the church by isolating Catholics from the mainstream and thus diminishing their influence in the life of the nation. The majority of the hierarchy, however, were convinced that in a country in which Catholics were a

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small minority of the population (4 percent), and where Protestants were militantly in control of the schools, Catholic schools were necessary to protect the faith of the people, especially of the immigrants.

The question when it broke out a little more than a century later had a different emphasis. Not only were the Catholic schools isolating, argued their critics, but they drained the parishes of vitality. In many a parish the direction and financing of the school had become the chief preoccupation of the clergy. Parish life centered around the school. The needs of adult Christians were not met; Christian family life was not properly fostered; parishioners without ties to the school were second-class parishioners. One of the most articulate and thoughtful of those who took this position was Mary Perkins Ryan, author of *Are Parochial Schools the Answer?* Many of these critics saw these schools as usurping the rights of parents to a great extent. They also felt that the structure of the Catholic school system tended to insure a mediocre, if not an inferior, education.

Those who did not question the existence of the schools doubted that they could survive in the face of the exodus of teaching sisters and brothers and the spiraling costs of education. They detected an unwillingness on the part of the Catholic laity to continue to carry an ever-increasing financial burden. In 1970 Father C. Albert Koob, president of the NCEA, and Russell Shaw, director of information at the U.S. Catholic Conference, tackled the problem in a book entitled *S.O.S. for the Catholic Schools*. They documented a decline in the number of schools in the years immediately preceding their writing—by 3 percent in one year alone—and in the number of students (by about 5 percent in the last year). They wrote:

"Many laymen seem to have lost confidence in the Catholic schools, or to be on the verge of doing so, because they perceive, quite correctly, that these schools are not *theirs* in any real sense but are, rather, extensions of the authority (and even the personality) of a clerical or religious decision-maker. They find themselves being asked to support the Catholic schools financially, or, more important, to enroll their children in them, without having anything to say on how these schools are run."

And John Cogley, discussing the schools, wrote in *Catholic America* in 1973, "In increasing numbers they [young Catholic parents] are no longer willing to make the financial sacrifice necessary to maintain a separate school system, especially at a time when the costs of education have skyrocketed. There is reason to believe, then, that in the days ahead the Catholic educational establishment will diminish dramatically."

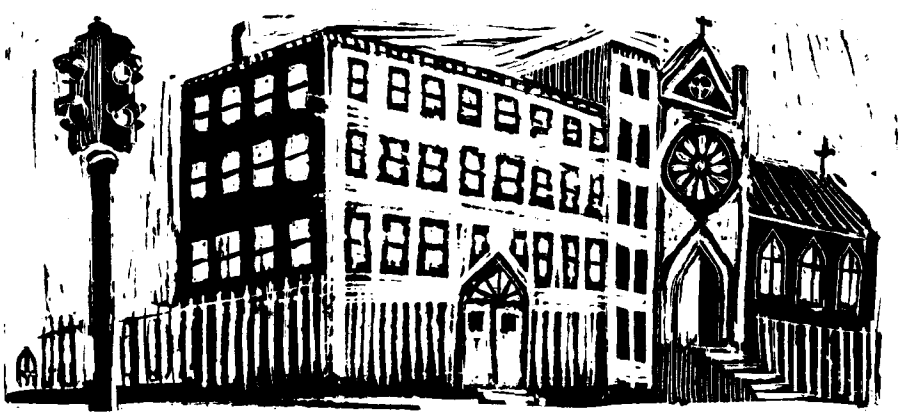
But Rhoda Goldstein, Director of the Data Bank of the NCEA, could still write in 1977: "[Catholic schools] seem to have weathered such storms as the loss of almost 60,000 religious community members, the movement of millions of people to the suburbs, a changed theological attitude regarding Catholic children attending Catholic schools, and the financial crunch of additional lay teachers in a period of inflationary wages and costs." And now in 1983 as parents and educators gather, although the decline has continued, although polls show that half of the country's Catholics no longer attend Mass regularly, although 75 percent of the schools' teachers are now lay, the schools persist as a force in the church.

What is the reason? Why do Catholics cling to their schools? As Cogley noted, the most amazing thing about Catholic schools is that they came into existence at all. Catholics these days are as prosperous as their neighbors, but "when the parochial school system got under way, most of them were members of the working class, poorer than other Americans, and barely literate. Their schools, unlike Catholic schools in Europe, Latin America, and Canada, had to be supported by voluntary contributions."

It was a docile laity which accepted the necessary sacrifices in the beginning, but, as years passed the schools, more than anything else, gave a special flavor and mark to American Catholic life. They also fostered unity among Catholics in a large and diverse population and instilled pride in the history of the church and its intellectual tradition. "Psychologically," said Cogley, "the very existence of the schools . . . was probably liberating for a people who might otherwise have come to feel culturally inferior in a confidently 'Protestant' nation."

It is possible that the schools played much the same role for Catholics shifting from the neighborhoods to the suburbs. They became a focal point for Catholic families and a source of identity. In addition, in the sixties the Carnegie-sponsored Notre Dame study and the Greeley-Rossi study effectively dispelled the notion that Catholic schools were inferior and divisive. In the seventies it became apparent that public schools throughout the nation were in financial trouble and declining in quality. Often, in the last decades, Catholic parents have rallied opposition to the decision of bishops and pastors to close schools. Even lay-run and lay-staffed, the schools, they seem to feel, must continue to exist as an alternative, as a choice.

ABIGAIL McCARTHY



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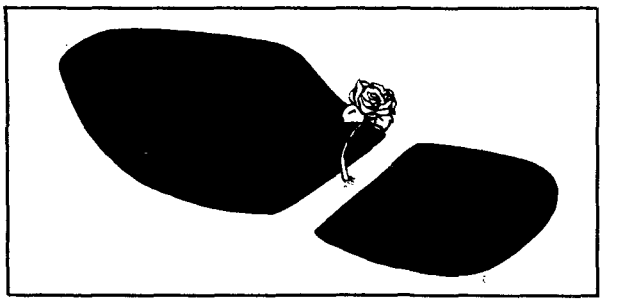

The revolution & democracy

Deborah Meier and Rafael PiRoman visited Nicaragua early this year. They went as two of the three co-chairs of a delegation from the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), a U.S. affiliate of the Socialist International. Although their trip was brief, they had unusual opportunities to interview numerous government officials and Sandinista leaders, as well as independent trade unionists and members of the political opposition. Their views are their own and do not necessarily reflect those of other members of the delegation. The delegation and the DSA national board did, however, issue strong condemnations of covert American aid to anti-Sandinista military forces. Commonweal *interviewed Meier and PiRoman in mid-March.*

Deborah Meier is a democratic socialist, active for several decades in the civil-rights, anti-war, and women's movements as well as in efforts for educational reform. She is founder and principal of Central Park East School, a special public elementary school in East Harlem. For her work as an educator, she was the recipient in 1981 of the Fund for the City of New York's award for outstanding civil servants. She is on the editorial board of Dissent *magazine and has written widely on the teaching and testing of reading. Rafael PiRoman is business agent for the east coast's Local 15 of the National Association of Broadcast Employees and Technicians. A national co-chair of the DSA's Hispanic Commission, he has a master's degree in international affairs, specializing in Latin America.*

THE EDITORS

WHAT WERE the major social and economic initiatives stressed in your discussions in Nicaragua?

Deborah Meier: Health and education. Everyone seemed to agree that in the area of health, there's been an enormous improvement. The major effort has been in bringing paramedical help to the villages and teaching people some basic preventive medicine techniques. The impact on infant mortality was staggering. The figures did not seem to be disputed by anybody.

Rafael PiRoman: Because we stayed in the city, we didn't see the development of the countryside—the distribution of land, the distribution of credit—which was one of the things most talked about. And, of course, the literacy campaign.

Meier: In some ways that was puzzling. I have a pamphlet here with figures claiming that the number of elementary schools has been doubled. Yet when I met with the people from the Sandinista teachers' union and pressed on educational matters, nobody mentioned that information. Everybody told me about the literacy campaign. In fact, I was more interested in those figures about schools. I was less impressed with the campaign because from what I saw I doubted that it could make an enormous dent in illiteracy—if what you mean by literacy is knowing how to read. I have some of the tests that the students had presumably passed, and the tests are, at best, advanced first-grade level. On one actual test I was given, the student had failed although it was marked passing.

Nonetheless, judging from everything people told us, the campaign was successful from a broader viewpoint. It was an intensive three-month period in which all the educated people went out to the countryside. People made a whole new range of contacts. They talked politics. They became literate if by literacy you mean an awareness of what's happening in your society as a whole. The campaign also paid a great deal of attention to local culture, collecting local art works and local lore and establishing local museums. All of this was a relatively inexpensive way to build morale and give some sense of national identity.

PiRoman: In Managua we spoke to a leader of the CDS, the Sandinista Defense Committees. They are organized block by block, neighborhood by neighborhood, city by city. Part of their job is literally defense of the revolution. They take turns walking the beat. But another part is to insure that scarce goods are equally distributed—and also goods that are not scarce but necessary. They insure that there's no hoarding.

They've had problems with that, which they were the first to tell us. In certain block organizations, the fact that important items flow through the organization has been used to intimi-

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date people who are in opposition—or just in opposition to the local committee leader.

Meier: These block groups are part of the Sandinista party structure, not the government structure. There is still a market system of distribution. I went to one of the supermarkets. At least in the middle-class neighborhoods the stores looked well-stocked. The emphasis, however, is on providing a minimum standard so that no one starves. That involves some form of rationing. The exact mechanism for obtaining the rationing cards remains a puzzle to me. As do a lot of things about the structure of the country. If you were trying to make a chart on how that country is organized, you would have a hard time figuring out even how they claim it is organized, leaving aside how it really works.

PiRoman: In large part that's because the organization is in flux.

At the time of Somoza's overthrow there was much insistence on maintaining economic and political pluralism. To what degree has this occurred? Economically, to begin with.

PiRoman: Economically, the Sandinistas have been very pragmatic and intelligent. A large portion of the land was owned by Somoza, and that is essentially what they have expropriated. There is pressure from the bottom to be more radical economically, to expropriate more, to be less responsive to creditors. But the government has been extremely responsible in paying off debts accumulated during the Somoza regime. Nicaragua has the best record on debt payment in the region. So it is clearly a political act for the international banks not to lend them money. The goal is to keep the profitable sector of the economy happy economically while reducing its power politically. A difficult goal. To date, there hasn't been the mass exodus that occurred in Cuba after the revolution.

Meier: The Sandinistas haven't collectivized the land either. They are eager to have more cooperatives and collectively-owned land, and they provide incentives toward communal landowning. But there are no requirements and no penalties. They are willing to have individual landowning.

PiRoman: There is no "Five-Year Plan." Everybody involved in economic planning told us that they were concentrating on acquiring data they can use later. They don't seem to have an overall strategy beyond diversifying their trade so as to insure their independence. The aim is to trade 25 percent with Western Europe, 25 percent with Eastern Europe, 25 percent with Latin America, and 25 percent with the United States. They also insist they want to maintain a mixed economy; right now the breakdown is 40 percent government, 60 percent private enterprise. They believe they have to do this to survive.

And on the political side?

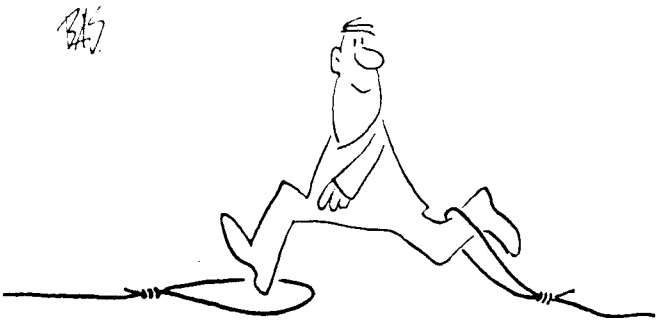
Meier: The one thing that nobody seems to quibble with is that real power rests with the nine Sandinista comandantes. You don't have the impression that they make all the decisions in every town. You don't have the impression of a thoroughly authoritarian structure in which decisions are all made at the top and carried out all the way down the line. It is not yet highly bureaucratic.

PiRoman: It seemed clear to me—well, how much can be clear in six days?—that decisions are made because of pressure from the populace. The leaders are mindful of what people want, of what different sectors want. Whether or not it's a mindfulness that is ad hoc and may wither away as power is concentrated, to the degree that it exists right now, the society is an open one.

Meier: There are two side-by-side structures which represent "the revolution." One is the government. It is led by the three—formerly five—Junta members. It has a judicial branch. And it has the Council of State. Next to it is the party, the *Frente Sandinista de Liberacion Nacional* (FSLN), led by the nine comandantes. The branches of the party are these various mass-based organizations: the women's organization, the official trade-union organization, the agricultural coops, the cultural organizations, the Sandinista Defense Committees, even the militia. These mass-based organizations are the form in which the Sandinista party is organized. To what degree are decisions made from the bottom up or the top down? I get the impression it's largely a relatively permissive communications network.

When we met with a representative from the women's group—not a very sophisticated woman, I would say—we tried to press the question, what happens if there were disagreements? The question arose around the issues of abortion, birth control, and sex information. Under Somoza these were prohibited by legislation, and the present government's position is to make no changes in any of these areas. We asked: If the women's organization disagreed with that, what would the mechanism be for dealing with the conflict of views? She kept insisting, "But we don't disagree with the government. Those issues are not the agenda right now." Someone said, well, suppose you did disagree—or maybe just one group of women disagreed—how would that be expressed and resolved? It was impossible to get an answer.

There may well be a mechanism for handling such disagreements, but this women's organization representative was



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unsure about it herself. I found that in various conversations. There was a difficulty in even imagining a disagreement.

PiRoman: Ultimately I think this woman said what was said in all the Sandinista groups. If there is a sentiment it's brought up in a group discussion, and if the sentiment wells up, the hierarchy will respond. It's both scary and inspiring. They cannot conceive why, if they disagree with the government, the government would not heed them.

Meier: Unfortunately, this assumption, that any real dissatisfaction will rather spontaneously form a new consensus and naturally be heeded by the leadership, provides no mechanism for those who remain in disagreement with a consensus to organize for their viewpoint. The general atmosphere blocks them from putting forth their viewpoint more widely and trying to persuade other people.

Are local leaders and higher officials in these organizations elected or appointed from the top?

PiRoman: Some of each.

Meier: The sense is that if people show revolutionary fervor, they will be coopted into the leadership.

But that means chosen from the top according to criteria about which there seems to be a consensus at the moment. You said there was a mixture of appointment and election.

Meier: We got different answers from different people. At some local level people probably do elect their leaders, formally or informally.

PiRoman: They definitely elect the leaders of block organizations. They definitely elect the union leaders.

Meier: The top leadership of the mass-based organizations is apparently not elected. The comandantes select it.

What about your meetings with the opposition?

Meier: There were two elements of opposition with which we had no direct contact, the regional opposition from the Atlantic Coast and the Catholic hierarchy. We spoke to people from *La Prensa*, some of whom are close to the church hierarchy. We met for three hours with the secretary-general of the *Central de Trabajadores Nicaraguenses* (CTN), the central body of the opposition trade unions, and more briefly with the CTN executive committee.

PiRoman: We met with the executive committee of the opposition political front, the *Coordinadora Democratica*, which encompasses a number of political parties, the CTN, another opposition labor group, and the businessmen's association.

Meier: While we were visiting the CTN office, a group of bus drivers from the CTN union in Managua came in. They said that they had just been discharged on the grounds that they refused to work more than eight hours without a break on Christmas eve and New Year's eve. One of them said he was fired for coming to work five minutes late. But in reality, they charged, they were fired because they were CTN members. The CTN outlined a number of ways in which it was becoming increasingly difficult to maintain the independence of the CTN as a union.

PiRoman: The usual harassment, obstacles to organizing. According to CTN officials the CST, the official Sandinista union, makes it very difficult for them to collect signatures.

Meier: The contracts they have are not abided by. The procedure for solving grievances or disputes is dragged out so long that the contract isn't meaningful. Meetings are broken up. In some cases, leaders have been arrested and detained. And even when the courts overruled those arrests, the leaders weren't released.

It was intriguing. The CTN headquarters are a big building, and no one was reluctant to tell us where they were. In that sense, you had an impression of openness.

PiRoman: And it was the Sandinistas who arranged for us to meet with them and with the Coordinadora.

Meier: Our guide, who was a Sandinista, came into the meetings — the only meetings he joined us for were the meeting with *La Prensa* and the meeting with the opposition parties. Maybe there was something they would have said had he not been there. If so, it's hard to imagine what. They were very clear and forceful in his presence. In that sense they're not reluctant to speak out.

They have literature that speaks out. They don't distribute it very widely; it's not easy for them to get their viewpoint across. They are obviously afraid of losing their jobs and the possibility of being arrested. But you didn't sense a climate of terror — that is, with stories of people being arrested in the middle of the night, or people disappearing. We didn't hear any such stories. They did not claim that they were afraid to turn around or that their phones were tapped. None of their claims were of that variety. They felt the political "space" to operate in — and they used that word frequently — was continually being narrowed. The definition of what is counter-revolutionary is always being tightened. There is an increasing tendency to call any disagreement counter-

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revolutionary and to accuse people of being CIA agents if they disagree.

What complaints did the political parties have?

Meier: The same ones. For reasons that are not absolutely clear, they all said it was impossible to hold large-scale meetings. You can invite people to a small meeting. But if you have a large meeting, something happens. We were told by the Sandinistas, "No, they are allowed to hold meetings." But the opposition all said it was not possible. Sometimes they referred to the emergency decrees in place since March 1982.

There are also bands of what are called *turbas*, young enthusiasts who break up meetings. The government's position is, we regret it but we can't restrain them.

PiRoman: At the long meeting with the Secretary General of the CTN, he made the situation sound so bleak that I said, "What you're saying is that Nicaragua is becoming another Cuba." "No," he said, "Nicaragua will not become another Cuba. We are not an island. But we may become another Mexico." It came as a relief to me. Of course, he may be wrong.

Meier: What he meant by another Mexico is that you'll have a party permanently in power, and opposition parties will be allowed to have considerable freedom of press and then it will be restricted more or less. Sometimes opposition will be labeled counter-revolutionary, at other times it will be tolerated, depending on what the powers that be want. The other issue raised by both the CTN and the Coordinadora was that they don't believe Nicaragua has remained non-aligned, and international non-alignment was one of the promises of the original revolutionary coalition. This was emphasized again in our meeting with *La Prensa*. We met with the entire editorial board, including Violeta Chamorro. *La Prensa* is the only independent source of news. Newscasts aren't allowed on the private radio stations, and television is entirely controlled by the government.

At the moment everything in *La Prensa* is precensored. Sometimes things are cut entirely and sometimes the editors are asked to make specific changes — add a word here, leave out a phrase there. They would prefer the old system — to be shut down occasionally. What happens now is much more ideological. In fact, they claim they had greater freedom to print their viewpoint under Somoza.

PiRoman: They told us what stories were censored the most: any story at all critical of the Eastern bloc or the Soviet Union; stories about the pope, especially about the "Bulgarian connection" or John Paul II's planned visit; statements by the opposition parties; and, curiously, stories from Costa Rica, specifically stories dealing with the Foreign Minister of Costa Rica.

Meier: It's peculiar. The first argument the Sandinistas gave us for press censorship was security. But clearly that did not justify most of what we saw censored. It also doesn't follow logically, because there is a bulletin board in the front of *La Prensa*'s office where all the censored stories are posted.

PiRoman: The U.S. embassy gets xeroxed copies of the censored stories.

Meier: Apparently they send out several hundred copies, and that is not done covertly. Now if the material contains military secrets, that is an odd thing to allow.

What claims did the various groups make about popular opinion, for and against the government?

Meier: The opposition claimed that the majority of the people supported them, not the government.

PiRoman: And that support for the Sandinistas is dwindling. But everyone else, including the U.S. ambassador, told us that if an election were held, the Sandinistas would win overwhelmingly.

Meier: The question I was curious about was, given the fact that they seem to be the party that would win an election, why are they so reluctant to hold one?

Did you ask any Sandinistas?

Meier: They said an election would be divisive and expensive: they don't have a census, it would be difficult to register people, candidates would be making a lot of outrageous claims. At this period, they argued, everyone had to pull

You Are Light to Me, I'd Lied

You are more
than light to me.
You are you.

The eye's share
of the sea is
one slice, one

layer of blue.
The blind heart drinks
the full sea.

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together and face the military threat from the United States and the grave economic problems. It was unfair to divert energies into an election.

PiRoman: I know we differ on this. I think those are compelling arguments. I think an election would be divisive.

Meier: Well, that's the case with any election. Everybody in power has always said it's divisive to hold an election — and it always is. People will, in fact, make accusations you feel are unfair. But what the Sandinistas have to gain is enormous. Nothing would more clearly establish their legitimacy or undercut American opposition than to have an election in which observers saw that the Nicaraguan people had overwhelmingly elected a Constituent Assembly.

PiRoman: I suspect they don't see elections as something that would legitimize them that much. Remember, Somoza was always elected. I do believe their arguments for postponing elections are compelling. What isn't compelling, and what is actually frightening, is the argument that they are building a better form of democracy in which elections, as we know them, aren't important.

Is it possible that although an election could legitimate the regime, they don't want to legitimate elections?

Meier: There is something to that. Sandinistas we spoke to would go into a long speech about how elections are a phony form of democracy, how Western countries always harp on elections, but the revolution itself was the people speaking, the people speak through the mass-based organizations — as though elections were a kind of Western fetish and not the Sandinistas' idea of democracy.

Similarly with press censorship. We asked whether they considered it something temporary and unfortunate. There was an enormous amount of waffling about what was unfortunate versus what was really a higher form of press freedom. We raised questions about whether some of the censorship of *La Prensa* wasn't frankly ideological. No, we were told, it was a matter of truth versus non-truth. What about specifying particular words to be used or not used? Well, language is a political tool, and the use of this or that word is a way of distorting the truth and fooling the people. At one point there was a reference to the fact that "our people are ignorant" — they lived a long time under Somoza and the opposition groups are taking advantage of the people's lack of sophistication. The people, we were told, don't understand that *La Prensa* is really a counter-revolutionary publication.

Would there come a time, we asked, when censorship would not be necessary? If it wasn't for the American military pressure, would that make a difference? Then the discussion would switch to all kinds of internal problems that would have the same effect — the attempt of the bourgeoisie to reestablish its power, for example. We attempted to raise the question: aren't there dangers, given the history of authoritarian left-wing regimes, in the path you are taking? There were no responses. This lack of interest suggested to me that they have not learned anything about the risks to the revolution itself in this facile dismissal of liberal democracy and the importance of a legitimate opposition. They talk a lot about the lessons of history. From Cuba they have learned that they don't want to be totally dependent on one country. But none of the lessons they stressed had to do with democracy, with the dangers of a small party speaking in the name of "the people."

PiRoman: Sergio Ramirez did express concern about the bureaucratization of the revolution.

Meier: That's not the same thing.

PiRoman: But that's that he meant. It's a euphemism for the danger of authoritarianism. The bureaucratization of the revolution, the revolution from the top down.

To what extent are the restrictions we've discussed the consequences of American pressure on Nicaragua?

Meier: For the first year after the revolution, the U.S. was not belligerently hostile, as it is today. What would have happened if that had continued? What would have happened if the U.S. had even been extremely supportive? It's hard to assess. My impression is that the Sandinistas' hostility to the United States and their generalized sympathy toward the Soviet bloc are matters of ideology and not based solely on the U.S.'s recent opposition. It reflects opposition to Western imperialism generally and specifically to the U.S. imperialism that has been Nicaragua's historical experience. In addition, their Marxist-Leninist ideology has led them to be sympathetic to the Soviets. Incidentally, one of the countries they don't have diplomatic relations with is Yugoslavia.

PiRoman: Or Albania.

Meier: We spent a good bit of time going into bookstores, all of which had more or less the same collection of books— Marxist-Leninism and liberation theology. Clearly they don't draw from a lot of other sources ideologically. That hasn't happened suddenly because of United States hostililty.

You didn't see François Mitterrand's latest book on sale?

Meier: There were no other varieties of socialist literature. I think that reflects the ideology that they brought to this revolution and that they are carrying out.

The existence of a very clear danger from the United States makes it enormously more difficult for the opposition groups to be legitimated. The claim that they are counter-revolutionary, or CIA agents, is far more credible in this environment and undercuts their capacity to function. When Edén Pastora leaves the country and goes into exile it's much easier to identify him with the United States and the CIA and the ex-Somocistas than it would be in a situation where the U.S. was not intervening militarily.

Similarly with the large military build-up. An army and a militia under the control of the Sandinista party are, in the long run, a danger to democracy. That would be harder to justify, especially given the economic problems, if it wasn't for the

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unequivocal threat from the United States.

Did the opposition say anything about the U.S. policy?

PiRoman: They opposed it.

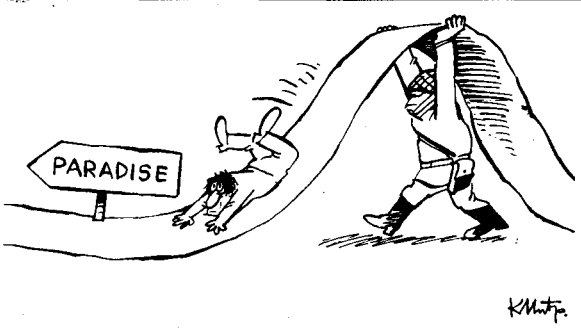
Meier: Not passionately.

PiRoman: It wasn't the first thing they talked about. To some degree they thought it was stupid. But again, their immediate concerns were . . .

Meier: Their own survival.

PiRoman: Aside from the political stupidity of the U.S. position which would reinforce any totalitarian elements that may well exist in Nicaragua, it's really an outrage. This is not a marginal thing that's happening The consequences of the northern incursions are real and quite a loss to the Nicaraguan revolution. These are strategic and calculated incursions. Their first targets are the technicians who come into the countryside. It's a terrorist and intimidating strategy. It's a total scandal, especially considering the phony excuses. Even the U.S. ambassador admitted, in a manner of speaking, that our concern for human rights was a bogus legitimation of that kind of activity, given our support for Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala. It's very draining on the Nicaraguan economy, very draining on the Nicaraguan people. It's a real outrage.

Meier: In fact, imagine the impact on the political climate of the United States if every day there were reports of Americans killed on the Mexican or Canadian border.



PERSPECTIVES ON NICARAGUA—II

Voices of the opposition

JOSEPH E. CASSIDY

WHILE LUNCHING with a lady who strongly supported the current role of Nicaragua's Sandinista Front of National Liberation (FSLN), I was asked where I had gone to Mass. "Over at the Carmelite Church," I replied, "it is right around the corner from Casa Fiedler, my hotel." "Oh that's too bad, that church is right in the heart of the 'contra' (anti-Sandinista) area. You should have gone to Barrio Roguero. There Father Molina's church is 'with the process' "—favoring the Sandinista rule.

Visiting Catholic churches to gather some insights into the political reality is a valuable practice in Sandinista Nicaragua. I visited quite a few and talked with pastors and parishioners. But the reality did not fit the labels bandied about:

Item: The allegedly "*contra*" barrio, whose church had no political murals and whose sermons contained no statements of support for the FSLN or "the process," was the home parish of Nicaragua's head of state, Comandante Daniel Ortega, a thorough-going Marxist.

Item: The term "*contra*" was used to label Violeta Chamorro and her son Pedro, the elite directors of the independent newspaper *La Prensa*, but it did not apply to the other equally wealthy Chamorros who head the two pro-Sandinista papers, *Barricada* and *El Nuevo Diario*.

Item: Father Molina's church, to which I had been referred by my luncheon companion, was indeed surrounded by poor people's houses and was thoroughly Sandinista in appearance, but I located other poor areas where the parishes not only had no political overtones but where pastors were considered "bad guys" by the Sandinistas and the people were labeled "conservative" and "bourgeois" even though they were miserably poor.

In sum, things are not simple in today's fast-moving Nicaragua. The well-off, without pain, can become "proletariat." And the poor can be elevated into the odious category of "bourgeois" and still remain miserable. It is all done simply by manifesting a certain attitude critical of—or even less than supportive of — the way the FSLN has been wielding the governmental machinery.

Many Sandinista social programs are unquestionably worthy of praise. But opposition to Sandinista rule can hardly be called "not caring for the poor." By no means. Opposition to the Sandinista Front runs through all levels of society, has grown from almost none to a significant amount in three and one-half years, and is being expressed in a variety of ways by five groups: guerrilla warriors in the north, clandestine operations all over the country, political parties and labor unions headquartered in Managua, recently organized exiled groups headquartered in San Jose, Costa Rica, and the Nicaraguan Catholic church minus the "popular church" elements which support the government. In northern Nicaragua, the anti-Sandinista Democratic Nicaraguan Force (FDN) has attacked positions fifty miles or so from the Honduran border. It has an internal branch, a paramilitary organization organized

JOSEPH E. CASSIDY *spent two months in Nicaragua interviewing people representing all factions in the Revolution, including exiles living in Costa Rica. His articles on Nicaragua have appeared in* The Christian Science Monitor *and the* Denver Post.

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throughout Nicaragua. It draws recruits from the politically discontented and performs some acts of sabotage. Originally, the FDN contained mostly Somoza Guardsmen — and thus was viewed with hatred by decent democratic Nicaraguans. Now, its spokesmen claim, it is both an ally of the anti-Sandinista Atlantic Coast Indian organization (MISURASATA) and a magnet for people of all walks of life who are drawn to its guerrilla efforts as the only effective outlet they see for their politics. The FDN claims to be composed of 80 percent workers and peasants, 15 percent defectors from the Popular Sandino army, and 3 percent Somocistas. Since it is obviously to the FDN's interest to minimize the Somocista

THE SANDINISTA CASE

PERSPECTIVES ON NICARAGUA—III

VAN PULLEY

SKIRMISHES BETWEEN the volunteer "People's Militia" and opposition forces led by the exiled Somoza National Guard were common between August 1981 and July 1982 when I did agricultural work in Nicaragua with a team of recent graduates sent by Georgetown University. I returned to Nicaragua last January and found the counter-revolutionary attacks greatly stepped up and the economy in serious trouble.

My first indication of Nicaragua's economic deterioration came in El Salvador's international airport. A Nicaraguan carrying five cartons of Salvadoran cigarettes warned me, "You'd better stock up here because they've stopped making filtered cigarettes in my country." Eliminating filters on cigarettes is part of the economic austerity plan to halt all "luxury" imports. Nicaragua owes $315 million in interest payments in 1983 alone on their external debt of $3 billion. This represents about seventy percent of all estimated export receipts for last year.

Other results of the counter-revolutionary activity were also evident. At one peasant cooperative near Santa Cruz that had just received land under the agrarian reform, five heads of families were serving in the militia, leaving only four to work the land. In an attempt to scare off workers and disrupt the harvest, rebel bands had been kidnapping or killing coffee-pickers and their families. "I'd rather do anything than go pick coffee," said Maria, a young *campesina* woman who usually works at one of the northern plantations. The government mobilized thousands of students, government workers, and others in coffee-picking brigades to harvest the crop. Many carried rifles in the fields to defend against attacks. The mobilization was a success; the harvest was one of the largest in history.

I found that the Sandinistas had not lost notable support as a result of such economic and military problems. With reports of American aggression increasing, more people seemed to be tolerant toward the difficult political and economic choices the government was making.

Despite the emergency situation, the Sandinistas continue to emphasize social reform. Adult illiteracy was reduced from 50.3 percent to 12.9 percent during the literacy campaign, according to the government. Total expenditure on education went from 1.3 percent of GNP in 1978 to 4.2 percent in 1981. There are currently over one million students in Nicaragua in a population of 2.7 million. This is double the number enrolled in 1978.

A quarter of the student population are adults taking evening classes. Public schools generally have three shifts per day in order both to handle the burgeoning student bodies and to allow students to continue work. Most *campesino* families are still dependent on the labor and income provided by their children.

Another Georgetown volunteer who helped an isolated community of twenty-two families build their own schoolhouse writes this: "The school has 40 seven-to-ten-year-olds in the mornings, 35 eleven-to-seventeen-year-olds in the afternoon, and 30 adults at night. The school has become a real source of pride for the village and is changing the quality of life here."

Government expenditures on public health have increased fourfold since 1978. The Ministry of Health now provides free medical and dental care for anyone needing it. Over seventy-eight thousand volunteers have participated in national campaigns to eradicate malaria, measles, and polio; and infant mortality has declined 28.7 percent, according to government figures. So many poor have begun to take advantage of the new medical services that the system is badly overloaded. The foreign exchange shortage has forced cutbacks on some drug imports. It took a dozen Managua pharmacies last January to produce five bottles of glucose for a friend with hepatitis.

As of January, 400,000 acres of land in the category of "idle and under-utilized" large estates have been expropriated. According to the Ministry of Agrarian Reform (MIDINRA), 170,000 acres have been redistributed to 7,733 families. Rent ceilings have also been set, and rural credit has been expanded enormously. Seventy-thousand *campesino* families received loans for the first time in 1979-80 from the nationalized banking system. The initial expansion was greater than the sector could productively absorb or the state could administer, causing subsequent amounts to be cut somewhat.

The state confiscated over two million acres of prime agricultural land from the Somoza family and close associates. State farms now represent about nineteen percent of farm gross domestic product. Critics charge that the state has simply become another old-fashioned landowner—

VAN PULLEY *is a graduate student at the Woodrow Wilson School of Public & International Affairs, Princeton University.*

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element in its ranks, one may be skeptical of those figures. However, one should also remember that it is to the Sandinistas' self-interest to convince the world that the FDN is nothing but a Somocista operation. It is widely held on all sides that the FDN is the spearhead of Washington's destabilization of the Sandinista regime, and therefore it simplifies things to believe that the FDN represents no one except the hated Somocistas and the outside interventionists. But I have heard credible reports that an increasing proportion of the group — perhaps a quarter to a third over the last six months — is drawn from the regular ranks of Nicaraguan society and has no Somocista past.

only bigger. MIDINRA Minister Jaime Wheelock replies, "Those who make this claim have failed absolutely to understand the significance of this revolution: that the state is not now the same state; it is a state of producers; we organize production and place it at the disposal of the people."

Although production in the state sector has not been as high as expected, social achievements in the state farm sector are impressive. Many farms have their own clinics, schools, child-care facilities, and unions. I spent ten days last year working on a state coffee plantation near the Honduran border. Changes there after two-and-a-half years of the revolution were apparent. Real money wages had been maintained or improved slightly in spite of inflation and wage restraint by the government. Laborers claimed they were now given better food, including meat once or twice each week, something unheard of during the Somoza era. Before the revolution workers had slept in typical *galeras*, coffin-like boxes stacked one on top of each other. There were no sanitary facilities or electricity. Workers and their families now sleep on simple wooden bunks in new, lighted cinderblock buildings. The local union was in the process of organizing a school for their children.

Decreasing production and thus damaging the economy is a way many large landowners oppose Sandinista reforms. This is one thing that prompted the law expropriating inefficiently cultivated land. Some of the large landowners are supporting the counter-revolutionaries and even welcome American intervention. One wealthy dairy farmer from Managua said this, "I met the American ambassador, Mr. Quainton, at a party recently and asked him frankly, '*When* is the U.S. going to stop all the rhetoric and really *stick* it to the Sandinistas?'"

The Sandinistas claim that their goal is to transform the system to one satisfying the basic needs of the poor through "democratic" channels. Elections have been promised for 1985, but so far the Sandinistas have not defined the form these elections will take. Manuel Cordero, the Nicaraguan Chargé d'Affaires in Washington, states that the outcome will certainly not be a system exactly like that of the United States. "Nicaragua has tried American 'liberal democracy.' What we got were many years of occupation by the U.S. Marines to prop this system up and then forty years of exploitation of the poor by the Somoza family. Can you blame us for looking for an alternative?"

Nicaraguan First Secretary for Political Affairs Francisco Campbell explains that it takes time to create a new political system from the ground up. "When you build a house, don't you plan carefully so that it will be sturdy and resist weathering? . . . The American Founding Fathers laid the U.S. groundwork deliberately. Your system has withstood all challenges of time and is viable today. Six years elapsed between the American Revolution and the selection of your first president. It was many more years before the American people were allowed to vote directly for a president since it was felt they were not well enough informed. Nicaragua is only asking for six years to prepare our people for elections."

The Sandinistas have used several methods to organize the populace, allowing for grass-roots participation in the reform process and creating a base of political support. The most important are the neighborhood Sandinista Defense Committees (CDS), made up of families who live in the neighborhoods and participate in activities on a voluntary basis.

The responsibilities of the CDS increased recently when the groups were given the task of distributing sugar ration coupons, causing some complaints that you have to attend CDS meetings if you want your ration. Coupons allow families to purchase one pound of sugar per week for each family member. Last January the system seemed to be functioning smoothly in most areas.

At one CDS meeting I attended in a poor neighborhood in Estelí, families gathered to decide what to do about several bars and cafes that had opened up recently near the new school. The consensus was that the bars were a bad influence on their children and the vote was unanimous to ask them to move. The owners of the bars had chosen not to attend.

"In this neighborhood, the people have direct control over what goes on," said one mother after the meeting broke up. "We vote on matters that really concern our families. We elect our local leader. We also watch out for unfair prices by unpatriotic storekeepers, and organize voluntary watches at night to keep our neighborhood safe. Isn't this participation and democracy?"

"We may disagree with the Sandinista leadership at times," said Rosa, a first-grade schoolteacher from Estelí. "But we will *never* allow the National Guard to return. Somoza didn't give a damn about us [the poor]. This government is *trying* to help us."

Many Nicaraguans I've talked with said they would like to have a better relationship with the United States, but their perception is that the Reagan administration is doing everything possible to sabotage what they see as a new Nicaragua.

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Unfortunately, like both the Salvadoran and Guatemalan regimes, the Sandinistas also do not allow foreign journalists to do investigate reporting among the insurgents, so there are very few journalistic accounts of the northern guerrilla activity. The guided tours which the Sandinistas provide foreign journalists yield little more in the way of information than do the press releases provided by the government of Managua.

WITHIN Nicaragua, only four parties and two labor unions publicly operate as witnesses to the revolution's promise of political pluralism. Grouped in the Coordinadora, an umbrella organization that increases efficiency, are: the Liberal Constitutional Party (PLC), the Social Democratic Party (PSD), the Social Christian Party (PSC), and two labor unions. Adan Fletes, president of the Social Christians, is also president and chief spokesman for the *Coordinadora*. And the Democratic Conservative Party usually articulates publicly with the others but refrains from *Coordinadora* membership mostly for historical and a few ideological reasons.

In the political spectrum, the Parties, as I shall refer to them for brevity, are left-to-center; for Americans, that means quite socialistic; our hard-liners would reject them out of hand. The Parties possess an ideological commitment to alleviating social misery, without however leaning on Marxist-Leninist rhetoric or social analysis, nor seeking aid and advice from Havana and Moscow.

All the Parties opposed Somoza. Many members died in the struggle that put the Sandinista Front in the driver's seat. And all were enthusiastic for guided change in July 1979. But then the "dialectic" began working overtime in Nicaragua. In the Council of State, representation was increased to give the Sandinistas a clear majority. Political rallies by some of the Parties were disrupted by Sandinista mobs (those favoring the Sandinistas called them "spontaneous uprisings of lower classes against bourgeois usurpation of power"). And two non-Marxist members of the original Junta, Alfonso Robelo and Violeta Chamorro, resigned.

There then followed more of the same. In the spring and summer of 1981 party members were jailed for speaking out against poor government, others were exiled. In March 1982, the government announced special emergency laws in virtue of the guerrilla activity, Indian uprisings, and U.S. covert destabilizing action. Overt political activity by the Parties is forbidden, including rallies and large meetings. But their headquarters remain open, a few people are present, work goes on, public relations officers are available along with small amounts of literature. For some unknown reason, the Conservatives publish, uncensored, their magazine *En Lucha*. To various degrees, the Parties' headquarters, and the homes of some members, were harassed or attacked by the Sandinista mobs ("*turbas divinas*" — "divine rabble"—according to *Barricada*). Most often hit was the Social Christian headquarters — seven times in one year. And though the Parties really are denied the media, some important statements do get out because the Parties seem to have effective press agents at the San Jose (Costa Rica) daily, *La Nacion*. Recently Nicaraguan subscribers to *La Nacion* have been complaining that their papers do not arrive through the Sandinista-controlled mail.

The Parties' leaders and officials valiantly move around in the little space provided for them by the Sandinistas in the body politic. For example, in January of this year, some traveled abroad to represent their ideology and aims to groups in three-or-so foreign nations. This trip was paid for by the president of Venezuela with whom the Parties are ideologically attuned. From the standpoint of Western political science, the Parties are the historical depository of democratic values. They have an ideology both socialistic and democratic enough to do the job at hand — if they could only go to the polls and let the people decide.

But from the Marxist-Leninist point of view, which is the guiding ideology of the nine ruling Sandinista comandantes, the Parties, unbridled and scurrying about seeking support, hinder the inevitable revolutionary reconstruction. For that reason, the government recently gave the Council of State a proposal for a New Law of Parties. Since the proceedings of the Council of State are not transmitted to the public through the media, the *Coordinadora* and the Conservatives refuse to discuss it in the Council.

This pleases the Sandinistas, because in the Council and out of the Council, they have another group of parties that will discuss it. This is called the Patriotic Front (FPR). The Popular Social Christian party (PPSC), the Liberal Independent party (PLI), and Nicaraguan Socialist party (PSN) compose the Front. In a parliamentary situation, the first two would vote with, or form coalitions with, the Parties of the *Coordinadora*. Now, however, they prefer to form a coalition with the Marxist FSLN. Their reasons are: (1) the emergency situation caused by the U.S. and the counter-revolutionaries does not permit opposition; (2) the promises of pluralism always meant a "guided" participation of proven revolutionary-minded parties (not bourgeois people trying to coopt Nicaragua for the middle class); and (3) since it takes a lot of time to work out a

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real revolution, now is a poor time to rock the boat with the type of elections envisioned by the Parties. Finally, the ideology of the third group, the Nicaraguan Socialist Party, is at least as Marxist-Leninist, if not more so, than that of the Sandinistas. So it forms a natural coalition with the Front and the Sandinistas. The Patriotic Front does criticize Sandinista policies; it never challenges the FSLN's dominating role.

It is interesting to note that, within the perspective of northern Central America — with what may be the swiftest political, economic, and social changes in the world — the Nicaraguan Parties and their shadows, the Front are about the only centrist or left-to-centrist politicians still functioning. Guatemalan generals have about eliminated theirs; except for the Christian Democrats, Salvador's socialist yet democratic groups are with the guerrilla forces; the counterpart in Honduras has had only a short-lived influence on the government and will probably be soon gobbled up by the military because of the "emergency" situation on both Nicaraguan and Salvadoran borders and the fact that the flow of U.S. aid enriches only the military.

WHILE the Parties in Managua wait for something to happen that might nudge them into the center of power, down the Panamerican Highway, in San Jose, Costa Rica, some Nicaraguans are working in exile to do just that. These respectable anti-Sandinista exile groups (Somocista groups in Miami and like places are not respectable) consist of one umbrella group containing four previously existing organizations and a "union" open to all exiled Nicaraguans regardless of their previous affiliations. The Revolutionary Democratic Alliance (ARDE) is the umbrella group formed in October 1982. The "union" is called Nicaraguan Assembly of Unity (ANUDE), formed in July 1982. As for goals, ARDE's and ANUDE's plans do not differ from those of the Parties, the guerrilla/clandestine forces, or even those of the Nicaraguan Catholic church — stave off Marxist-Leninist dictatorship and open the doors to pluralism. The exile groups have a wider range of options, but at present none uses, claims to use, or is charged with using Costa Rica as a base of armed forces against the regime in Managua. Some individual Nicaraguans were arrested last summer, however, for arms traffic; anti-Sandinista training camps have been closed down by Costa Rica; and culprits arrested or deported. Finally one group, the Democratic Union of Armed Nicaraguan Forces (UDN/FARN), was deported from Costa Rica for trafficking in arms. A spokesman for its comandante, Fernando (El Negro) Chamorro, added that ideological difficulties with ARDE caused Chamorro to move to Panama.

The motor-force within the exile anti-Sandinista umbrella organization ARDE is the Alfonso Robelo/Edén Pastora combination. Alfonso Robelo who was in the original revolutionary Junta for a year, heads the exiled Nicaraguan Democratic Movement (MDN), which functioned as a strident part of the *Coordinadora* (the Parties) until April 1982. Then the MDN closed up shop in Managua, all its leaders fled to San Jose, and the Sandinistas confiscated the Party's property. Robelo's paper, *Rescate,* contains all the latest horror stories of Sandinista misdeeds.

Edén Pastora was a Sandinista guerrilla fighter for years and a member of the top FSLN command until he split with them in June 1982. Known as Comandante Zero, and always the most magnetic of the Sandinista comandantes, he had declared publicly that, since he was not a Marxist-Leninist, he would watch carefully to see that the revolution was not betrayed. His threatening charges of last spring ("I'll drive you [the other nine comandantes] out of your luxurious homes and Mercedes Benzes if you do not drop the Marxist-Leninist dictatorship") may have caused his temporary expulsion from Costa Rica. But he is back now, legally, and behaving well. Pastora's organization, the Frente Revolucionario Sandino, (FRS) broadcasts regularly into Nicaragua and is expected to have a genuine effect within the Sandinista army; his newspaper, *Pueblo en Lucha por su Libertad* (red, white, and black like the FSLN's own symbols) is beginning to circulate widely in Nicaragua.

Also affiliated with ARDE is Arturo Cruz, a patriot who worked hand-in-glove with the Sandinistas for two-and-one-half years before renouncing his connections. He was president of Nicaragua's central bank after the revolution, was a member of the Junta from May 1980 to March 1981, and served as ambassador to the United States. Since all these leaders opposed Somoza, and did sincerely try to work with the Sandinistas, they are expected to have a strong influence within the current anti-Sandinista movement. Last October,

Richard M. Nixon

You may own the forest
and the sawmill and thank
the God of wood for both
and still run out of plank.

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Robelo's paper strongly suggested that the only door open to the anti-Sandinistas might be armed rebellion. Yet in the name of ARDE, Robelo has more recently challenged the Sandinistas to settle all differences by an open election this coming June. In this way, a full-scale civil war would be avoided.

Very little is known about Brooklyn Rivera's Union of Atlantic Coast Indians (MISURASATA), the third member of ARDE. It may be a counterweight to Stedmen Fagoth's organization among the same Indians in North Nicaragua. It is said to be filled with Somoza guardsmen; Rivera however has no Somoza connections; his real basis of support or attraction remains a mystery.

Finally, among the Nicaraguans working against Marxist-Leninism in the most beautiful city in all Latin America, San Jose, is UDEN. Ideologically identical with ARDE, indeed sharing office space and public relations officers, it was founded in July 1982, and seems to be actually run by Wilfredo Montalban, the former president of the Social Democrats, who fled Nicaragua last year. As a broad civic organization with close ties to international democratic socialism, UDEN is giving a needed structure to the anti-Sandinista movement. Through it, Montalban expects to pressure the Sandinistas into at least modifying the revolution if not handing it over to the Parties.

THE NICARAGUAN Catholic church, the final group included in this panorama of anti-Sandinistas, is, because of its structure, far more effective than parties, exiles, guerrillas, or clandestines. After first issuing statements in support of social change through humanitarian-democratic socialism (November 1979), most of the bishops grew cool toward what they noticed as Marxist-Leninist tendencies. Meanwhile enthusiastic clergymen applied the Latin American church's "option for the poor," in such a way that the FSLN was treated like a new Moses. The local base communities, fashioned by these devoted people, were to be the real progressive church.

An article twice this size is needed to encompass this question, especially in the wake of Pope John Paul II's visit to Nicaragua. But by now, the confusion is gone. It is widely understood that the five priests in government office are not there, as it was assumed, to tone down the FSLN's extreme leftist leanings. The FSLN's Marxist outlook is compatible with the priests' own liberation theology interpretations. The vast majority of Catholic clergy will continue to oppose all Marxist-Leninist moves, especially since there is no right-wing dictatorship to serve as the complete opposite of Marxism, as there is in Guatemala, Chile, and Argentina. Thus, the Nicaraguan Catholic church, minus the elements that support the FSLN, is the best and most effective ally of the other groups within this panorama of anti-Sandinista Front.

The prospect of any immediate success for the anti-Sandinista movement is dim. The bottom line is that the Sandinistas have the guns. Tragically, ideology has kept them from realizing that for a decent social revolution, the nation needs a viable economic and political system acceptable to the mainstream of Nicaraguans.

Stage

BUCK STOPS HERE

NEW PLAY FROM RONALD RIBMAN

THE DEATH of Tennessee Williams reminds us—as if that were necessary—of how many fine plays he wrote and of how important they were to the postwar American theater. It also reminds us of the string of weak and ineffectual plays he turned out in the last few years and his paranoia about critics—all of whom, he was convinced, were out to get him. The difficulty is that the admirers of a man's work—and in Williams's case they are legion—always expect that the new play will be even better than the last. This is not possible; it is probably not even desirable. Although the works of any dramatist have strong family resemblances, every play creates its own artistic problems, the solutions to which—or the failed solutions to which—give that play its shape, its substance, its force. The difficulty with *Something Cloudy, Something Clear* is not that it is not *A Streetcar Named Desire*, but that it seems insufficient on its own terms. It would be a nice irony if time proved that those of us who felt that "seems" at *Something Cloudy* were wrong and Lanford Wilson, who cried at it, was right, but for now we can all mourn the dead artist and be thankful for the remarkable work he has left us.

These ruminations on Williams, death, time and the fact that the playwright, like the Gypsy's daughter at the full moon in *Camino Real*, becomes a virgin again with each new play, are meant as celebratory for Tennessee Williams. They also provide a useful lead-in to Ronald Ribman, one of our best and least appreciated dramatists, and his new play, *Buck*. He last had a play in New York in 1977—*Cold Storage*, that triumphant comedy set in a terminal ward. It was so rich, so joyous, so exuberantly controlled that we Ribman true believers sat on the edge of our chairs for six rump-sprung years waiting for him to top that one, to unveil his new splendor. We should have known better, for Ribman, even more than Williams, moves with each play into a new setting, a new idiom, although he drags his familiar dark themes with him and his passion for language. *Buck* is everything *Cold Storage* is not: sprawling, uncertain, filled with grotesque and multiple layers of theatrical action, more abrasive than funny, its lyricism often in danger of becoming a whimper. It is disappointing, which is seldom fatal in Ribman's case (except commercially), for his plays become more substantial with each return to them, their eccentricities turning nicely into the theatrical metaphor they always were. This is especially true once one gets past the surface subject matter that so often confuses critics and occasionally the playwright himself; *Buck* is no more a satire on cable television than *The Poison Tree* is a prison problem play. Besides, Ribman is a playwright, like Williams, for whom a first production can be a step to a later,

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surer version of the work, as both *The Poison Tree* and *Cold Storage* indicate.

So there is hope for *Buck*. But there is already much of value in the script, on the stage. In this play, as in most of his plays, Ribman is dealing with the terrifying forces of a world in which man's best impulses are defeated, in which it is difficult to tell the victims from the victimizers, in which varying ways of seeing, color reality. The protagonist—the Buck of the title—is an up-from-porno-films producer who works for a cable television company founded as a money laundry for gangsters who have discovered that crisply-packaged sex and violence makes it a money tree instead. Their product, the fruit of Buck's artistic vision, is the dramatization of famous murders, done with the subtlety of sadistic erotic cartoons and made on the cheap since the performers are real derelicts, drifters, loners who have been dragged in off the streets to play similar characters on screen. Buck's problem is that he has become distressed with what he is doing, a dehumanization that reduces complex beings to fragments—the sexual parts—and robs the crimes of any social context. He tries to insert explanatory narrative, political motivation, sympathetic re-creation of character; this last leads to two versions of the same murderous event, one porn parody, the other an almost realistic attempt to understand the victim, neither likely to provide the truth of the situation. Buck's discontent comes from his growing sense of the potential killer in himself, presented comically in the department-store scene in which, hunting arrow in hand, he dreams of bringing down a rug, and more seriously in the off-stage story of his ex-wife and her new husband, who despite court rulings keep him from seeing his son. He screams instructions to his lawyer to tell them to make it possible for him to see his child or he will kill them. In the end, the gangsters control the product; the performers, toward whom he feels protective, continue to be abused by his colleagues; and, as far as we can see, he has no chance to be the father he dreams of being.

In the production at the American Place Theater, it was difficult to decide which effects were Ribman's and which belonged to the director, Elinor Renfield. Buck was played almost realistically by Alan Rosenberg; only occasionally—personal exchanges between Buck and the cynical cameraman, a confessional appeal from a sex club performer longing to go legit—did other characters approach this style. Most of the time, he was an isolated believable person on a field of caricature. The gangster figures, larger-than-life black and Jewish stereotypes, seemed closer to the enforcers in Joseph Papp's idea of Sam Shepard's *Curse of the Starving Class* than to wonderfully outrageous Ribman inspirations like Immanuel in *Harry, Noon and Night* and Zoditch in *The Journey of the Fifth Horse*. There was no qualitative or presentational difference between the cartoon scenes being filmed and the cartoon scenes played among the filmers. Although I assume that this was intentional—the line between reality and fiction disappearing as actual and pretended violence and vulgarity become the same—it lacked clarity on stage, an intellectual point without dramatic validity.

Ribman said in interviews in *Other Stages* (Feb. 24) and the *New York Times* (Mar. 6) that he sees the play as a positive statement, an indication of the necessity of continuing to fight against the victorious forces of darkness. It is a belief that he has often expressed before. The last moments of the play find the cameraman, about to venture out into winter weather, searching for his rubbers. Buck reminds him that the new-fallen snow will be beautiful as he walks home, and the cameraman says that by morning it will be dirty, ugly, have turned to shit. Buck, sitting alone, says, "It's a wonder it bothers to fall at all." I found myself thinking of the moment in *A Ceremony of Innocence* when Ethelred cries out, "Is this world a dungeon wherein men in their chains strike one another?" and a broken-hearted Kent answers, "Yes! Though you would not have it. Yes!" With the life-in-death ending of *Cold Storage* still warm in my memory, let me allow Ribman to answer, "No." Or, at least, "Yes. . . but. . ." After all the snow does bother to fall.

GERALD WEALES

Media

WATCHING TALK

DONAHUE AS DIET COLA

WHEN THE MARTIANS finally arrive on the burnt-out cinder of Earth, and their tentacled anthropologists try to reconstruct our civilization from newspapers, LP records, and video tapes, I think they will be especially fascinated by that distinctive twentieth century form of drama, the talk show.

The *talk* show: or the talk *show*: what kind of culture would find entertainment watching people converse? Or better, for what kind of culture is conversation—the most civilized and delicate of skills— a spectator sport?

Well—runs the predictably boring sociologist's answer—a culture that had lost, largely, the art of conversation and therefore needed to be reminded, however artificially, of its existence. It is not that this may not be a true explanation of the popularity of the form, at least in part: it is just that it does not fully explain the whole complexity, variety, and sometimes insidiousness of the form as it is practiced.

In the golden age of radio, there was no such thing as a "talk show": the format had to wait for television, for the experience of *watching* people talk. And contemporary radio shows—the pompously proletarian Studs Terkel, the fluent Larry King, and the brilliant Milt Rosenberg— are all, in one way or another, spin-offs from the television phenomenon.

Johnny Carson, of course is *hors de combat*. Like Chicago's silly Wrigley Building, New York's bag ladies, and L.A.'s flatulent air, he is so much a part of the landscape as to be virtually undiscussable, even in an odd way unnoticeable (I

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mean, do you *notice* the grilled cheese sandwich you always have for lunch?).

But the Mervs, Mikes, Dinahs, Dicks, and others who populate so much of daytime television serve a rich—if a little goofy—cocktail of ideas; or better yet, of what we think of as ideas at this point in the century. Who would have missed Merv Griffin, with the solemnity of a bishop, interviewing Paul Newman (*Paul Newman*?) on nuclear disarmament; or Dinah Shore, face frozen in a smile, watching Andy Kaufman systematically demolish her whole, chat-in-the-living-room format?

And then there is Phil Donahue. Why is it, one wonders, that the most successful, popular, and universally liked talk show host on television is also the most egregious? With his open, handsome Irish face, his authentic spontaneity, and his evident passion for ideas, he *ought* to be the real thing. But then, so ought diet cola.

Perhaps it is that "passion for ideas" that is at the heart of the problem with Donahue. He is famous, of course, for discussing controversial topics: gun control, gay activism, the decline of the Roman Catholic church, and transsexuality have all featured—often—on his shows. And he is invariably sympathetic, concerned, eager to give the proponents of unpopular ideas a fair chance to be heard. In fact, a little *too* eager: you can't watch Donahue for any length of time without realizing—first uncomfortably, then surely—that his enthusiasm for discussion, his consuming interest in fairness, his boyish eagerness to *understand*, is a performance. It is rather like watching Sammy Davis, Jr. sing "I've Gotta Be Me" in Vegas. All that existential heroism, one thinks; all that triumphant *selfhood*, winning through against any obstacle. And then one realizes that this riveting confession is part of the dinner show, repeating night after night, with even the breaks in the voice preprogrammed into the act.

Now there is nothing wrong with drama. Like Sammy Davis playing himself, Paul Scofield can play King Lear night after night and still excite us. But in their case the charade of conviction *knows* that it's a charade. Donahue's spontaneity, on the other hand, is more disingenuous (for which read, if you want, "nastier"). It claims to be a sincere commitment to knee-jerk liberal idealisms, but in fact it turns out to be as stage-managed and as predictable as the creakiest melodrama from a sophomore creative writing course. If the "talk show" is, as I've said, an artificial representation of what real talk is like, then Donahue is the perfect incarnation of that ideological emptiness. He has turned the liberal knee-jerk into a high-stepping cake-walk. That's his talent, and that's his curse.

Not that he is a hypocrite. Hypocrisy, after all, is idealism turned inside out; the really skilled hypocrite, like the really successful burglar, knows where the gold is hidden, and how valuable it is. You can't help feel, watching him go through his motions, that he really *believes* in his own earnestness. Interviewing Milton Friedman, the brilliant conservative economist, he is *truly* consternated at Friedman's outrageous (and quite sane) defense of the free-enterprise system. Interviewing a "married" gay couple wishing to adopt a child, he is *truly* concerned with their plight. He is always *truly* something. The problem is that that something is always just the business of being Phil Donahue. If the hypocrite and burglar at least know where the real gold is, and recognize its value, the counterfeiter shortcircuits the whole structure of value: it may be why Dante put the false-coiners so low in Hell.

Confronted with a real conversational street-fighter (e.g. Chicago's Mayor Jane Byrne) or an accomplished snake-oil salesman (e.g., Jesse Jackson), Donahue tends to fade. So much of his personality is invested in being *nice* that he really can't handle people willing to be less than sweet for the sake of making a point. He is, after all— as he confesses to great length in his smarmy autobiography—a Notre Dame boy, an ex-Catholic who saw the light of liberal reason sometime after the breakup of his first marriage, and has been pursuing it ever since. But, ex- or not, that altarboy sweetness not only remains, it's his stock in trade. Challenging, controversial, even disruptive ideas are his joy and his toy; but only as long as they remain within the borders of the *nice*, only as long as they can be broken down into "terms an ordinary guy can understand," to paraphase himself on any of a thousand occasions.

But, as anybody who's ever been in the grip of an idea will tell you, that's just what really important ideas *aren't*. Donahue's audience is predominantly white, middle class, and female: a much-maligned, much-satirized group who are, nevertheless, by and large sensitive, caring human beings. But in pandering radical ideas *to* this audience, and in frequently bullying or making fun *of* this audience when they ask reasonable, if conservative, questions of his guests, he manages to have things both ugly ways at once. That is, identifies himself as *one of them*, one of the ordinary decent folk, until it is to his conversational advantage to separate himself from them, thereby establishing his own more passionately committed understanding of the problem at hand (be it abortion or day-care centers or the balance of trade). He is, in other words, both in his charm and in his attitude the Liberace of ideas. He does to ideas what Liberace did to classical music in the fifties: cheapening it, and thereby implicitly cheapening his audience.

Of course, like Liberace (who first uttered the phrase that has become part of the language of hype), he may simply cry all the way to the bank about all this. But I wonder. And I wonder about the intellectual insecurity the talk show in general suggests, and Donahue in particular represents. Unlike most hosts, he never sits on the stage with his guests. Rather, he wanders through his audience, hand-held mike brandished (a Vegas gimmick if there ever was one), firing earnest questions at the stage. It is a clever piece of theater, because it establishes that Phil is one of *us*; and, of course, it also puts the poor guests at a maximum disadvantage (one of *them*). But the more one watches, the more one realizes it's also camouflage, a way of hiding out from the full responsibility of conversing—which, after all, is what the show is supposed to be about.

If Donahue *is* the talk show at its barest and baldest, then isn't this hiding-out maneuver—which he alone practices—a kind of admission that the audience, including you and me, is

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not only hungry for ideas, hungry for the sting of conversation, but also somehow frightened of it? The society that created *Donahue* and *People* magazine may have one big problem with personalities: we may not be able to tolerate them in their true bravery and independence until we have reduced them to media events, role-players trapped in their own roles. And that *is* the counterfeiting of the self: Donahue, in seance, interviews the ghost of Elvis about the price of fame. And the price *is* the interview.

FRANK McCONNELL

(Frank McConnell is a member of the English Department at the University of California, Santa Barbara.)

Books: BIOGRAPHER AS BLOODHOUND

THE YEARS OF LYNDON JOHNSON
THE PATH TO POWER
Robert A. Caro
Alfred A. Knopf, 882 pp. $19.95

Raymond A. Schroth

How do you write a good book about a bad man? The reputation of Robert Moses, the subject/victim of *The Power Broker* (1974), the man who "built" — and, in biographer Robert A. Caro's judgment, destroyed — New York, was barely in its grave when Giant-Killer Caro turned his eyes to the Texas hill country and the Lyndon B. Johnson Memorial Library in Austin and to a literary project that could possibly consume the next twenty years of his life.

In some ways, the choice of Johnson for his next target seemed apt. Both Moses and Johnson, measured by ego-bulk and the social and human consequences of their decisions, were colossi; both were insatiably ambitious, manipulative scalawags who used older men to get ahead and crushed or cast aside foes and weaker colleagues. And for both, the naked pursuit and possession of power itself seemed to fill that space where other — greater and lesser — men and women have hearts. The outline of the book seemed ready-made. Indeed, if Caro finishes LBJ and moves on to another Big Man, it threatens to become a formula: the brilliant but personally despicable engineer/politician scrambles into power by dubious means and, though he proves this power could be used to promote the public welfare (Moses's Jones Beach and LBJ's Great Society), he allows the monster in his nature to take charge and wreaks human misery (the Cross Bronx Expressway and the Vietnam war) on his community.

I stress "seemed." For in the Moses saga there was always the counter-theme of redemption, enough evidence of the engineer's benevolent vision — reinforced by a long run along the Jones Beach surf on a June afternoon — to let the reader admire him, especially when the biographer's negative case hung on the validity of the Jane Jacobs school of urban planning which values heterogeneous neighborhoods over developed downtowns and suburbs linked by highways.

But Lyndon Johnson was one of the most hated political leaders in recent memory. When he died in 1973 *Commonweal* received a manuscript, which we declined, from a prominent West Coast activist lamenting his death on the grounds that now radicals would have no focus for their hate. There was so little about him that inspired affection, or even pity (his self-pity made the compassion of others redundant.), that it is hard to understand how Caro could begin his interviews, as he says, expecting to like what he would find.

In the spirit of Francis Parkman, Caro went and lived on Johnson's soil; he got his old neighbors, college chums, congressional aids and political partners to talk. He cut through the layers of protective crust put in place by Johnson himself. He found what virtually every biographer finds: that the child is father of the man, that young Lyndon was a deceiver, toady, bully, coward, and fraud. He also found — and this may be this project's enduring value — that the Johnson story is the linchpin that holds together the other stories that explain the transformation of American society in the twentieth century: the economic development, through dams and oil, of the Southwest; the unprecedented use of big money to gain political power; the social welfare and civil rights legislation that began

Lament of the Cultural Attaché

(Poet approaches Public)

Misjudging the line's stately undulations, pace,
(Oh will they love me in some far, far land?)
I'm checking my zipper as
the Queen extends her hand.

from DEPOSITION by Pete Green
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with Franklin D. Roosevelt, Johnson's patron, and continued in some way until January 1982; Vietnam and the eventual discrediting of the American presidency.

The literary tragedy is that the central character of this drama is, like his successor as president, not of tragic but rather of pathetic proportions. As a child he ran away from home again and again, cried about spankings that didn't hurt, wouldn't let playmates use his baseball if they didn't let him pitch, stole the family car and smashed it, picked fights and continually got whipped. At Southwest Texas State Teachers College at San Marcos — where in 1927 only one of 56 faculty had a Ph.D. and several had no degree at all — Lyndon set the pattern for his political future. He ingratiated himself with the president to get easy student jobs, maneuvered himself into the editorship of the college paper, wrote flattering God-bless-you notes to pious teachers on his exam papers, gulped down more than his share of the food at the boarding-house table, bragged graphically about his sexual exploits, and rigged his own election to the Student Council. Best/worst anecdote: to win a girl's vote, Lyndon would assign a handsome young man to pursue and flatter her until the election, then drop her.

As an aide to playboy Congressman Richard Kleberg and as a young Congressman himself his behavior patterns were still those of an emotionally starved soul screaming for attention and already those of a tyrant king unconscious of or indifferent to the sensitivities of other individuals. He had to dominate any social group by telling his Texas yarns; and when the group's attention shifted to private conversations or someone else, Lyndon would fall asleep! Yet, he had a mysterious influence on young men. In two stints as a teacher he worked his students hard and pushed them on their reading, writing, and debating — although he himself didn't read, write, or speak well. Two former students came to work for him in Kleberg's office and he devoured them — one broke away after two years, the other stayed, in between nervous breakdowns, for thirty-five years as a "totally willing slave."

Meanwhile, in 1934, he had married the shy and very rich Claudia Alta Taylor who didn't like being called Lady Bird but who, perhaps as some measure of how free she has never been, has never been known to the American people as anyone else. According to Caro, she cooperated with his research for a while and then withdrew. She hovers in the wings of this story, as fragile as a bird, ordered about like a galley slave and shunted back to Texas so Lyndon could dally with Alice Glass, the glamorous Virginia redhead mistress of his Texas publisher patron, Charles Marsh.

Clearly, the relationships that really mattered to Lyndon Johnson were with older, more powerful men: Herman Brown, the Texas contractor who got him into Congress at twenty-eight in 1937 to guarantee the Marshall Ford Dam project into which Brown and Root had already sunk $1,500,000, and whose quick cash in the 1940 congressional elections, parceled out by LBJ, put legislators in Johnson's debt; the lonely Sam Rayburn, to whom Johnson played "professional son," with the ritual smooch on the bald dome, until Johnson could make points by siding with Roosevelt in the wild 1940 rift between the John Nance Garner-Rayburn Texas party and FDR; and finally FDR who, while grateful for the fact that Johnson continually ran for office as 100-percent pro-Roosevelt, also considered him a very remarkable and promising young man.

Yet, Caro shows that Johnson, who rode into power as a New Dealer, ridiculed the New Deal in the company of Texans who opposed it, indeed made an art of concealing his true convictions, if he had any. In his eleven years as a congressman, he neither introduced legislation himself nor fought for legislation introduced by others. When FDR died, LBJ shed a tear, then quickly told a stunned reporter he had never been a New Dealer and explained away his earlier loyalty with, "I was a young man of adventure with more guts than brains."

When we leave Lyndon Johnson at the end of *The Path to Power*, he has lost a special 1941 senatorial election in a steal and, in the wake of Pearl Harbor, is off to active service in the Navy. Caro warns us that the story of his war service is a "complicated" one; but we are left wondering what more there is to say. How many ways and for how long can a biographer, who brings to his task the investigative skills of a master detective, the righteous persistence of Victor Hugo's Javert in *Les Misérables*, and the evangelistic astonishment of Lincoln Steffens, tell us the man he's writing about is no good and still hold our attention?

I suspect the thrill of the next two volumes will come, as it did here, from the secondary players. Here they were, the poor Texas farm women who hauled water and wood and cooked and washed and bore the insufferable silence of the Hill Country until Roosevelt and Johnson brought them electricity; LBJ's father, Sam Ealy Johnson, Jr., the idealistic, failed country legislator; Sam Rayburn, the man who couldn't be bought but, Caro implies, could be fooled; and FDR, the master puppeteer, using those who think they are using him, and, as he was in *The Power Broker*, an offstage personification of the use of power, in a literary counterpoint to the main theme.

As I finished this book, on a visit to Washington, I took a long afternoon run through Georgetown, past John F. Kennedy's old home, along the Potomac, past Watergate, by the Lincoln Memorial where I had joined the 1967 anti-Vietnam march against the Pentagon, down the Mall, up the steps of the Capitol which LBJ himself had climbed, and then down to the new Vietnam War Memorial, where I read the names of the dead in mirror-black marble which reflected my own image. I sensed that Caro's biography could only get grimmer, sadder; and I thought of other Johnson anecdotes I'd heard — his compulsive narration to a priest of how he'd gone to a monastery to pray the Vietnam bombers safely home, his intimidating an unwilling but eager-to-please Hubert Humphrey into shooting a deer pointblank on the LBJ ranch — and wondered what Caro would do with them. And what will this biographer-bloodhound sniff out from under the banquet tables at Camelot? And finally, how will he explain all these Vietnam dead — if he has not explained them already?

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Variety within unity

THE ICON

Kurt Weitzmann, Gaiané Alibegasvili, Aneli Volskaja, Manolis Chatzidakis, Gordana Babić, Mihail Alpatov, and Teodora Voinescu

Alfred A. Knopf, $60, 419 pp.

John Meyendorff

THE EXTRAORDINARY interest in Eastern Christian iconography continuously shown by so many and so diverse people is creating a widespread demand for the art objects themselves and for publications related to them. This popularity leads to an ever increasing marketing of innumerable icons of very relative historical or artistic quality, and to the appearance of books with little educational value. In vivid contrast, *The Icon* was conceived and published by a remarkable international team of art historians under the general editorship of Professor Kurt Weitzmann of Princeton. The choice of illustrations and the excellent quality of the reproduction techniques make it a significant event in the field of art publication.

Opening with a general introduction by Weitzmann on the origins and significance of icons, the book is divided into seven chapters, written by the best specialists and discussing Eastern Christian art in various countries which were religiously and culturally connected with Byzantium between the sixth and the seventeenth centuries. The icons of Constantinople itself are treated by Kurt Weitzmann in chapter 1. The other chapters are concerned respectively with Georgia, the icons of the Balkan peninsula and the Greek islands, the period of the Crusades, Russia and Wallachia-Moldavia (or Romania), and are written by scholars living and working in these respective countries, except for the chapter on the period of the Crusades by Weitzmann himself.

The general conception of the book rightly emphasizes the centrality of Constantinople and the fundamental unity of the artistic and spiritual tradition in the Orthodox world — unity which, however, allowed for an incredible variety of local traditions and creative expressions based on national civilizations belonging to what has been called the Byzantine "commonwealth." Whereas the development of Christian art of Byzantine tradition in Greece and other Balkan countries, as well as in Russia, is well known, the fascinating art of Georgia, a country in the distant Caucasus region converted to Christianity in the fourth century and which, as distinct from neighboring Armenia, remained in communion with Orthodox Byzantium, remains largely unknown in the West. The place given in the book to Georgian icons chased in metal, to Georgian *cloisonnés* enamels, as well as the fascinating painted icons, often reflecting Persian influences, is highly welcome. Another discovery which readers may make is the art, in often strict Byzantine tradition, which appeared in areas conquered by the Crusaders, and often executed by Western painters who adopted the tastes and the techniques of locally flourishing Eastern Christianity. Thus, one discovers icons of Western saints — St. Martin of Tours, St. Leonard of Limoges — side by side with those of Eastern holy men, preserved for centuries in the world's greatest collection of early Christian icons at St. Catherine's Monastery near Mt. Sinai.

The title of the book — *The Icon* — indicates the inevitable limits of its scope. Although the word *icon* (Gr. *eikon*) means simply "image," it is used today primarily to designate portable pictures: paintings on wood, enamels, encaustics, mosaics, carved metal, or ivory. Professor Weitzmann rightly points out that "the widely accepted notion that an icon must be a painted panel" is a misconception, based simply on the fact that, in the later period, icons were most often executed in this form. Early Christian and medieval art admitted a much greater variety of techniques. On the other hand, *The Icon*, in the choice of reproductions and in the commentary, is not strictly limited to *portable* objects, but is also occasionally concerned with some monumental mosaics and wall paintings. This slight inconsistency was probably inevitable in a discussion of Christian art as such, and could have been avoided only by broadening the subject to include all the forms of that art in the Christian East.

The texts by various authors which accompany the reproductions provide a great amount of historical information

PRAYER

We feel God present and hear Him call us to be still.
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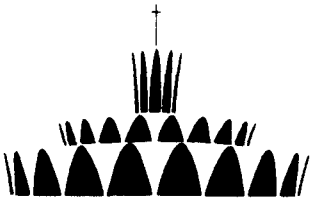

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and reflect differences in style and method. In some chapters a strictly comparative art-historical methodology predominates, while the chapter on Russian icons reflects stylistic concerns, very characteristic of the contemporary revival of interest for Old Russia in the Soviet Union. Everywhere, however, the eminent competence of all the authors makes this publication really exemplary.

The inevitably short but highly relevant remarks in the introduction about the theological justification of image veneration in Orthodox Byzantium by its defenders during the iconoclastic controversy (726-843), and about the connection which always exists between art and liturgy, should encourage those interested in the spiritual and theological dimensions of the icons to further reading in such publications as *The Meaning of Icons* by Ouspensky-Lossky, or in other, easily available introductions to the theology of the Orthodox Church.

Truth & illusion, art & perception

THE IMAGE AND THE EYE
FURTHER STUDIES IN THE PSYCHOLOGY OF PICTORIAL REPRESENTATION
E.H. Gombrich
Cornell, $38.50, 320 pp.

Nell Gifford

IT MAY BE no exaggeration to call Sir Ernst Gombrich, until recently Professor of the History of the Classical Tradition and Director of the Warburg Institute at the University of London, the most influential art historian of the twentieth century. Steadily, for half a century, he has pushed, tugged, and pummeled the traditional materials with which art historians work—objects, their iconography, dating, and attribution—molding his discipline into a new shape, something very nearly resembling "philosophical anthropology." His themes have been the processes of human perception and representation, and the varieties of illusion. In his hands, and in our time. These are not innocent matters.

Born in Vienna in 1909, Gombrich was trained in the traditional art-history-as-*Kulturgeschichte* that owed its foundations to Hegel and the German Romantics. Neither that *Kultur* nor its dogmatic foundations survived the 1930s, during which both Gombrich and his friend Karl Popper emigrated to England. Like Popper, whose *Poverty of Historicism* circulated in manuscript. In the thirties, he recognized the tyrannical uses to which privileged insights — the discernment of *geistes* — could be put. Also like Popper, he refused to lapse into an expressionistic relativism or nihilistic atomism, Janus options that had been taken up in the period surrounding the first war. The line between representation and illusion was a boundary that human culture could afford neither to ignore nor to trespass. But could it be located without resort to a priori claims about where it "should" or "must" be?

Looking back over Gombrich's career as teacher and writer, we can say that he lifted out our visual metaphors for learning and knowledge — at a time when the world had reason to question the foundations of knowledge — took them "literally," and asked what they might mean. The Herculean task of our century has been to establish a working theory of knowledge on the basis of empirical indeterminacy. For Gombrich-the-art-historian, that paradoxical necessity turned on the relations between representation and illusion, which, in his view, mirrored the perennial philosophical problem of appearance and reality. The search for some proportionality between our awareness of flux and our experience of order was the task, and he began his search with tools of his trade: caricature and *trompe l'oeil*, both devices that "fool the eye."

Caricature distorts every element of an image in order to communicate a likeness of the whole. How can deliberate distortions convey information? *Trompe l'oeil* accurately imitates in order to deceive. How is it that we decode the first, are misled by the second? When is illusion truthful; when is "truth" illusion?

Art, he came to believe, replicates and plays upon an elasticity of perception that originates in the retina itself. "There is no fixed correlation between the optical world and the world of our visual experience . . . as we move through the world, we experience a continuous range of visual hypotheses extending from the most general to the minutest particular." Perception itself depends upon hypotheses which we constantly propose to the indiscriminant barrage of retinal stimulation. "Seeing is a transitive verb," linking subjective hypotheses with ambiguous information to produce 'pictures' of the world. The problem, then, is to account for the ways individuals (and whole cultures) shape the imaginal 'space' between indeterminant retinal sensations and pictures-of-the-world.

That problem, obviously, is not unique to art history. Karl Popper — and subsequently Thomas Kuhn and a host of others — would come to regard the choices that scientists necessarily make among available hypotheses as "aesthetic." And Gombrich, combining the study of perceptual psychology and art history, moved to propose that perceptual acts depend on the coding of virtually infinite visual stimuli into a recognizable world, on the terms of prior hypotheses about its presence and nature. Along the way, the borders between his discipline and the philosophy of science, psychology, and contemporary philosophical epistemology faded. His analysis of the hypothetical nature of perception suggests a radical revision of

REVIEWERS

FATHER RAYMOND A. SCHROTH, S.J., *a former associate editor of* Commonweal, *is Dean of the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, Massachusetts. He is the author of* The Eagle & Brooklyn *(Greenwood Press).*

FATHER JOHN MEYENDORFF *is professor of church history and patristics at St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary in New York and the editor of* St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly. *His most recent book is* The Byzantine Legacy in the Orthodox Church.

NELL GIFFORD *lives and writes in New York City.*

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all traditional theories of *mind*, one in which the divisions between sense and thought, eye and mind, are demolished.

The data of modern perceptual research suggest a substantial unity of perception that undercuts radically the mind-body division upon which our ordinary understanding of ourselves is based. Our "seeing" is really much more like that of the computer-controlled cameras that NASA uses in outer space, cameras that generate images in response to questions that are put in them by people who must anticipate what they think will be there. Those are not innocent questions; they hope to be deeply informed. We do, too, and the "innocent eye," in Ruskin's infinitely attractive expression, in fact generates its images out of an indissoluble participation of eye-and-mind that draws upon memory and anticipation and requires time and mobility in order to organize random sensory stimuli. Cognition is irreducibly incarnate. Mind cannot be located apart from the senses, but is somehow displayed in their selection and attention.

This dazzling world of stimuli to which we are confined is yet a world that we share with one another and in which we are responsible. The 'pictures' we bring back from daily experience are not, like NASA photos, simply titillating. If they end up on the front page, it's because we've disagreed about their content, or nature, or implications, The limits of our knowledge, it turns out, are the limits of the world we participate in creating. If that world looks increasingly like a dwindling global village whose home address is Ground Zero, then questions of perception and cognition, as Gombrich and his burgeoning corps of interlocutors pose them, are neither innocent nor inconsequential.

The book we are considering here is a sort of holograph of Gombrich's treatment of representation-and-illusion over five decades. As such, it is an excellent point of entry for the newcomer, as well as a welcome amplification for those familiar with other works. *The Image and the Eye* is intended as a sequel to *Art and Illusion* (1960), where Gombrich examined the "code" of perception and representation as displayed in the record of Western art, which through the nineteenth century aimed for the successful imitation of nature. The logic of that code, he claimed, is transformational, translating three-dimensional perceptions, mobile and serial, into two-dimensional images that are fixed both temporally and spatially. In *Art and Illusion* Gombrich proposed that an analysis of the transformational logic exercised in painting might shed light upon the prior and distinct process of visual perception itself, whose inner workings — located in that evidently indistinguishable mind-eye — elude scientific examination.

In *The Image and the Eye*, he extends his research to twentieth century forms of representation (photographs, moving pictures, X-rays) and interpretation (information and communications theory). The ways in which we "read" television images and X-rays illustrate his initial proposition that ". . . the painter's starting-point can never be the observation and imitation of nature . . . all art remains what is called conceptual, a manipulation of vocabulary, and . . . even the most naturalistic art generally starts from what I call a scheme that is modified and adjusted till it appears to match the visible world."

Does it matter? Yes. If art "plays upon an elasticity of perception that originates in the retina itself," then the study of illusion and representation refers ultimately to the nature of the human subject, both individual and collective. The location — the possibility — of intelligibility is the fundamental question, and neither subjective nor objective answers suffice.

In classical Christianity, that collection of calls-and-responses that extended from Nicaea to the brief but brilliant synthesis of Thomas Aquinas, these questions were posed as having to do with "proportionality" and the "two natures." It was proposed that mundane intelligibility was grounded in the created relation between Nature and *Imago Dei*, whose proportionality analogically represented the relation between creature and Creator. Grace was a synthetic participant with Nature; revelation with "natural" knowledge. Something like that paradigm, shorn of the simplistic terms to which we reduce its elements when we are tired of thinking and looking, is suggested by Gombrich's claim that ". . . in our judgments which are based on visual impressions, sensation and judgment interpenetrate to such an extent that after a certain age it becomes hardly possible to separate them."

"The doctrine of creation," writes Karl Rahner, "has not to be considered

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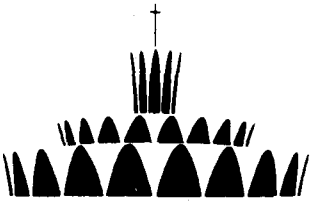

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as an object which is placed alongside the object of the doctrine of grace and of the supernatural order as something quite different from it. . . . An explicit exposition of man's way of knowing the creatural state is required in the doctrine of creation." "Incarnation," Rahner suggests elsewhere, is no accidental union of natures, "but is precisely what God himself becomes . . . when he exteriorizes himself into the dimension of what is other than himself." If that is so, then the participatory, synthetic, unaccidental way in which creatures come to know "the creatural state" is a proper topic for theological anthropology. And we could do worse than attend to the issues explored in this probing and engaging book.

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Correspondence

(Continued from page 226)

The church cannot go on without a Spirit-filled body, without a holy people set apart. It is not a question of a church of the elite. The answer does not lie in sub-culturating the people of God. And we must not allow those without a relationship with the Lord to be suddenly without a home as well. But the church can no longer afford to suggest that there is some middle ground. She must proclaim the Gospel of repentance and faith. She must do so in a way that, far from alienating, will radically call people to a new life that is immensely possible and imminent.

But the church must ask with her Lord for "all your heart and all your mind and all your strength." It is indeed a case of defining Catholic, and as it becomes less a definition of Catholic and more one of Christian, the church needs to get busy in enlightening her people. We need to *be* the way and not simply define it.

It seems to me that in order for the church to fully proclaim the reality of personal conversion and salvation there needs to be a conversion of institution and form as well. The leaders of the church are attempting to gallop the horses when the cart has broken down. People must see and experience the reality of the risen Lord proven in the life of the church. Not in a few saints or isolated groups but in the whole church in all its manifestations from institution to herald and servant of the great King. It cannot be foolish to hope that this is imminently possible.

STEVEN J. PUGLIESE

Annandale, Va.

To the Editors: My reaction to David O'Rourke's article [Feb. 11] was one of both interest and amazement—interest, because I too have been conscious of certain tendencies developing within the American church, but amazement because I was impressed to find out that perspective is everything. That is, O'Rourke is male, a religious, and a cleric, while I am a woman, a wife and mother and lay person; and I found our basic perception of what is actually taking place to be somewhat at odds.

I find an immediate difference between us to be the way each of us would define that reality called "church." One cannot miss that when Father O'Rourke speaks of it, he instinctively thinks of the institutional visage, especially as it manifests itself in terms of leaders and hierarchy. Thus the church that he has in view, the one that is on its way "to becoming a peace church," the one that has changed its priorities, the one that is bent on restricting the sacraments, this church is obviously a clerical church, the church of the new leaders. I, however, would prefer to think of the church as that body of community, continuous both in geography and history, that is first and simply what *Lumen Gentium* refers to as "the people of God."

Mainly we differ in our analysis of what is developing in the church. O'Rourke claims that significant changes are underway, specifically in regard to (1) church leadership, (2) church priorities, and (3) a new definition of what it means to belong to the church, one involving personal conversion and commitment to social causes. As far as the first point is concerned, there appears to be a substantive change in the church's leadership, but only if one is a member of the professional church. For the lay person—and despite the post-Vatican II appearance of parish advisory councils and the institution of the lay commission—institutional leadership continues to affect us in much the same way. The only perceptible difference is that the structure appears to operate a bit more collegially, in that a larger number of priests and now even women religious occupy positions of authority. . . .

What we are actually witnessing in today's church is a decided disinterest in lay priorities on the part of the church's leaders. For example, I think ministry in Gospel-fashion is what the laity wants from the church's leaders. This translates not only into the ritual celebration of liturgy and sacrament but also into help in discerning Christian meaning and value in contemporary life, as well as

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guidance in the ways to express one's faith actively in service to others, not just globally, but where it is more difficult and directly encountered—locally and familially. . . . And obviously what is desired here is clerical encouragement and support for the emerging new forms that lay ministry will inevitably take.

Another lay priority has been and will continue to be that of education. In the past this was a fundamental point of agreement between clergy and lay; in recent times however and as O'Rourke notes, the church's leadership, men and women alike, has almost entirely absolved itself of any responsibility for the educational ministry. It is suddenly not seen to be as important or as worthwhile to educate the church's own. . . .

Catechesis is the primary way in which the church perpetuates itself. What worries many Catholic parents is that their children no longer receive from the church a satisfactory induction in the rudiments of the Christian symbol system which, despite argument to the contrary, does require some degree of expertise that parents themselves do not always have. Because of this lack, adults increasingly encounter young Catholics who not only have a limited degree of commitment to the church but who also find much of church doctrine to be arcane and inexplicable.

In his article O'Rourke seems to presume the right of the leadership to set the church's priorities, his only concern being the haste with which the former have recently forged ahead. . . . Lay people now have great difficulty accepting *carte blanche* positions taken (outside clearly doctrinal matters) by the leadership which sometimes give every appearance of being hastily conceived and lacking sufficient study. I think that in many cases American Catholics wish that the hierarchy would take advantage of the wealth of expertise available to them; I also think that many lay people would prefer that the church's priorities be established dialogically. Because of hesitance to do so, many of us find the "new-wave" clergy to be just as autocratic and high-handed as their predecessors. . . .

Even the model of spirituality now offered us by the new leadership, which O'Rourke describes so well, is essentially a clerical one. This is by no means to deny that there are converted, committed social activists to be found among the laity, far from it. But our lifestyle by its very nature does not permit us such absolute dedication to any cause, no matter how important or how strong our convictions. By our very choice we live in the world and we must, particularly in these hard economic times, immediately concern ourselves with the very business of survival. Most of us have not only ourselves to worry about but have others who depend on us and for whom we are responsible. Neither do the majority of us have independent means for a sabbatical year in order to step back and evaluate; nor do we have a supportive community or institutions behind us that would give us the chance to focus our energies on one single project or endeavor. And unlike O'Rourke's clerical examples, our identity crises are usually associated with the most mundane of our routinized daily lives; our serious doubts about the very value and purpose of life occur at those moments that do not readily yield the satisfaction that what we do is either worthwhile or important.

We also find ourselves to be members not just of the church but of a variety of different social groups which also lay claim to our allegiances. What we of the laity so desperately need is to develop a spirituality that is authentically and uniquely our own. (With the advent of trained lay theologians this at last should become a possibility.) This must be one that takes into account the necessity of our diverse commitments. . . .

What kind of attitude towards our way of life is reflected both in (1) the failure to involve us in the setting of priorities for the local church and (2) present efforts to restrict the administration of those sacraments which ironically are *par excellence* the sacraments of the lay life—baptism, by means of which we are admitted to its ranks, and marriage, which symbolically validates the unique way we intend to follow Christ? One might conclude that the new leadership either does not understand our way of life or else does not respect it. If this be the case, how can the gap between us not help but widen?

GEORGIA M. KEIGHTLEY

Deer Park, Md.

To the Editors: Thank you for publishing Father O'Rourke's article "Revolution and Alienation in the American Church" [Feb. 11]; it expresses very well concerns which we have shared for a long time.

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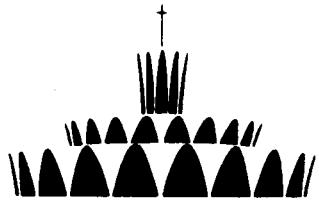

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without reservations the change of priorities "from self-interest to social interest." But we also agree that a whole generation of potentially committed Catholics is being alienated by the way this change is being brought about, especially as it affects the sacraments of baptism and marriage. Admission to these sacraments today almost requires the "conversion" Father O'Rourke talks about prior to their reception. Have the "converted" forgotten how long, and what fortuitous circumstances, it took for them to be converted? Have they considered how impossible it can be for young people to have this "conversion" opportunity, when they struggle through years of unrelenting, rigorous studies, often on loans and on a subsistence level? Or if they work two full jobs for years, just to make ends meet?

If these young people want to get married, perhaps in the bride's parents' home parish, they are informed that they must first attend the required series of Cana conferences. Often bride and groom live in different towns; they arrive for the wedding the day before, and there is no way they can get in these conferences. So they enlist the help of a friendly minister, or settle for a justice of the peace. (At which point the parents remind themselves that the priest is only a witness anyway.)

The same goes for baptism. The last thing a pregnant woman, inquiring about baptism for the baby due in a few days, needs to be told is "We baptize four times a year, but first you must attend five baptism classes." This approach may save the priest time, but pastorally it is a disaster. These occasions used to be an opportunity for good pastors to seek out the lost sheep and welcome them back. After all, the father in Jesus's parable did not send his wayward son to rehabilitation or "up-date" classes; he ran out and embraced him.

Traditionally, the Catholic church has been an all-inclusive church; are we now to become an exclusive sect? We hope not. We hope more pastors find better ways to bridge and "tolerate the gulf between Christian ideal and human achievement," even if it means cutting short a social justice meeting now and then. Thank you, Father O'Rourke; you have given us a ray of hope!

ERIC & MARY AMMANN

Calumet City, Ill.

To the Editors: It is always intriguing when two people look through the same lens at the same half glass of water and one sees it moving towards fullness and the other towards emptiness. David O'Rourke [Feb. 11] speaks out of his experience as pastor as I do as associate pastor. He names the reality we both experience as alienation. I experience it as a cohesiveness, a coming together as we articulate new goals. . . .

"The church," writes Father O'Rourke, "is leaving the ranks of mainline Protestants and Evangelicals to become like the Quakers, a peace church." My thesis is that the Catholic church, with the possible exception of the very early church, was never a peace church. It is not our tradition. The Catholic church is the church of sinners. We give communion every Sunday to rapists and racists. The pacifist and the first-strike nuclear bomb-maker both say "The Body of Christ" when I put the wafers in their hands. After the promulgation of the peace pastoral they will both continue to drink from the same cup. . . .

Few of our St. Victor parishioners have a deep interest in either side of the peace issue. One of the complaints I received recently was that there were no more vigil lights available after the 9:30 Mass. We burn two-hundred a week and the pastor is opposed to a third stand.

Last Sunday a parishioner complained that we do not bless throats on the Sunday after the feast. I explained that we blessed throats at all the Masses on St. Blase Day, but I would be happy to bless her throat and her friends' right to now between Masses. I was delighted to do this because the woman is a cleaning lady at the local high school, a model worker who brings joy to all teachers and students with her smile and work ethic. It is a trade-off. She accepts my using the pulpit to talk about social sin as long as I attend to her spiritual needs. She does not expect me to give a homily on the blessing of throats and I do not expect her to join our Peace and Justice Commission, which mounted a successful city-wide nuclear freeze campaign.

Are we turning people away because of a stricter view of admission to the sacraments? While the church has moved away from legalism, there are priests, young and old, who will be legalists from ordination to death. I hear the horror tales of what happens to people at their hands, but it is not an adequate description of reality.

When I was an associate pastor twenty years ago, all one had to do to receive the sacraments of baptism and matrimony was to come to the parish office with the proper documents and give us programmed answers to our questions. We no longer administer sacraments like bureaucrats or check-out girls. We prepare people to celebrate them.

When a parishioner of St. Victor's asks that a baby be baptized, the parents are told that they will be visited by a

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couple from our baptismal preparation team. It is a friendly meeting in which each listens to the other to arrive at a meeting of minds about mutual expectations. A decision may be referred to a staff member like myself, but I know of no refusals.

Maria was referred to me because she did not want a couple coming to her home. She was of Mexican descent brought up in Texas where Spanish was the language of her home. She was heavy-set, with the body of a field worker and clad with a peasant's summer garb. When I explained our stance that the sacraments are not magic and that they are celebrated in a community context which implies membership in a parish, there was a feigned smile of agreement. She had heard this when she was here twice before. "Are you a member of the parish?" "No, but I go to a Catholic church when I go." "Why do you want the baby baptized?" "My family always has the babies baptized." "Does your oldest child go to CCD?" Her smile means, "No."

We simply live in different Catholic churches, but I was very happy to baptize the baby on her terms. Such people have a lot to teach me about the Christian virtues of simplicity of life and generosity. I did not push membership in our parish with her. She would feel out of place as a member of our middle-class church. We have Mexicans, blacks, and Orientals who have assimilated our middle-class church manners. The issue was not nationality or race, but class. . . .

When a couple comes to arrange for marriage, a priest conducts the initial interview. We are more concerned with their hopes and desires than with the documents they bring us to be stamped. Dave and Debbie, age 18 and 19, asked me to marry them. I had many questions about their readiness for marriage. I referred them to a couple upon whom we mutually agreed. The couple, who lived across the street from Debbie, discouraged them from marrying. They insisted they would make it and were eager to participate in our parish engaged-encounter weekend. I told them I would consult with one of the team couples after the weekend. The team couple shook their heads. I consulted further with Dave and Debbie and told them I would make a decision. On Christmas Day I told them that I would be happy to marry them. A week later Debbie called to say that they were postponing the wedding for a year because of Dave's unemployment. At every moment of the process their dignity was respected. By offering challenges we feel that we are all coming together through prayerful discernment, the opposite of alienation. . . .

Father O'Rourke sees alienation in the church stemming from the conversion experiences of our leadership in the activist sixties. "The experience of conversion and commitment," he writes, "that is common on the leadership level of the church is simply not part of the experience of many Catholic people. After having seen the church changed under their feet without ever having been asked about it, they now see it walking away from them leaving them behind." This is too simple. Many people leave the church because they at last feel free to do what they would have done decades ago if they had not felt restricted by their Catholic family tradition. I am sure that some people have left because change was sudden and for which they were unprepared. It could be argued that an equal number might have left if the overdue changes were not made. . . .

Father O'Rourke does not seem to have picked up on the spiritual renewal of the activists of the sixties. The people who had Selma-like conversions make directed retreats, understand contemplative prayer, smile more, and laugh at themselves. They can be concerned with Salvadorian refugees and express deep compassion for the people in their own parish. The Risen Lord is present in the American church. . . .

(REV.) DENNIS J. GEANEY, O.S.A.

Correction

New York, N.Y.

To the Editors: In my article on the steel settlement [Mar. 25], I incorrectly identified the United Steelworkers Local in Johnstown, Pennsylvania. Chuck Molnar is president of Local 2635.

DAVID BENSMAN

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